

Being Sons of the Resurrection

SERMON TEXT: Luke 20:27-40

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In the name of Jesus Christ, our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord, who is not dead, but alive—who is not in the tomb, but is here with us now, with His love and His power, as He lives and reigns at the glorious right hand of God, our Heavenly Father. Dearly beloved of God, the source of this morning's sermon is our Gospel lesson. Let us pray...

O Heavenly Father, in giving us Your Son, You have given us the gift of Life everlasting. By Your Holy Spirit, who abides with us and in us, You have united us to Yourself and to one another as one holy communion in Christ Jesus. By Your Word, You sustain us, as we wend our way through this world, in the hope of the Life of the world to come, wherein we are counted as being the sons of Your Son's blessed resurrection. O Lord, open my mouth to speak, so that my tongue may tell of Your wondrous promises. O Lord, open our ears, and prepare our hearts, to hear of the wonders of Your Son. Amen.

Life. Death. Life after death. Dear brethren in Christ, for many people, far too many people, the very thought of death can so thoroughly drain the life out of living, such that any sober discussions about life under the ever present shadow of death, or even of life after death, are all too often avoided at all cost. We try to avoid discussing death with those who are dying. We don't even want to look upon those who have died until they've been made by a mortician's make-up to look like the living. Confronted by the casket, we would rather celebrate life than consider that our own condition continually calls us to

come to the same state. Death cuts us to the quick. Death cuts us so deeply that every desire is quickened in us to discuss something else— anything else. We try to bury any thoughts of having to be buried. We try and put to rest any thoughts of husbands burying wives or wives their husbands, thoughts of children burying their parents or parents their children. Yet, for how long can we avoid the unavoidable? Every soul that draws its first breath will one day draw its last. Nobody gets out of life alive. Yet, does death get the last word? No, God's Word says something else about the subject. It speaks about Life after death. It answers many questions, but not all. It brings to us, by divine revelation, what no human speculation can bring. Life. Death. Life after death. Dear brethren in Christ, God's Word brings to us the hope that carries us along in this life, such that we, as Christians, come to confess, "I believe in... the resurrection of the body, and the Life everlasting," and, "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the Life of the world to come. Amen."

Those who get to the point of considering their own passing or are brought to the point of considering the passing of another may begin to ask all kinds of questions: Is there life after death? What is heaven like, if it exists? If there's a heaven, is there a hell? Will I be aware of others? Will those who've gone before me be there to greet me? Will I spend eternity as some disembodied spirit, perpetually adrift upon a white cloud, somehow endlessly strumming a golden harp (because, in all truthfulness, that sounds more like hell than heaven)? Of course, the only One who could answer our questions truthfully is He who not only died and came back from the dead, but also happens to be the very Author of Life itself. Yet, while He hasn't provided us with the answers to all of

the questions that we might *want* to have answered, He has nevertheless provided us with the answers that we *need*. He reveals the truth of the matter to those who have the ears to hear His Word and believe. Yet, not all who ask such questions are actually seeking answers. Sometimes people who have already concluded that they have the answers to certain questions will ask questions of others so as to ridicule any answer that is contrary to their own. Such is the case in our text from St. Luke's Gospel. Such is the case with the Sadducees.

The Sadducees were a large and powerful sect that held the majority of the seats of the Sanhedrin (that is, the ruling council of the Jews) and they included numerous aristocrats, scribes, the chief priests, and even the high priest, among their ranks. They were often found to be in opposition to the Pharisees, who, although being a minority within the Sanhedrin, possessed more support from the people. One particular area of theological disagreement between the Sadducees and the Pharisees revolved around the issue of the resurrection. The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead. In fact, they believed that the soul perished with the death of the body— no reward and no penalty. They believed that there was no afterlife because behind the scenes there was nothing to see— no spiritual realm, no angels, and no demons. Whereas the Pharisees spoke of the *Olam Haze*, this world, and the *Olam Haba*, the world to come, the Sadducees only spoke of *Sheol*, the common grave; and therefore, for the Sadducees, there was no hope of life in the world to come, for no new world was coming. For the Sadducees, life was limited to life in this world alone. For the Sadducees, this life— whether long, short, hard, easy, full, or empty— was all there was for all. For the Sadducees, your rewards

and your penalties were played out in the days you were apportioned, according to the free exercise of your will. For the Sadducees, *this* life was it— all of it. It is truly sad, you see, that the Sadducees couldn't see past their party's perspective. They had God's Word, but they were deaf to it in this regard. It is truly sad, you see, that the Sadducees lived their days without any hope for tomorrow. It is truly sad, you see, that today, many, far too many, even Christians, live like the Sadducees. It shouldn't be like this because we too have God's Word, but, unlike the Sadducees, we also have our Lord's word to them. So, let us hear Him in this regard.

In our text, when Jesus was approached by the Sadducees, their goal was to put Him to the test. They were looking to mock Him in the same manner that they mocked the Pharisees on the matter of the resurrection from the dead on the Last Day, the Day of Judgement (which they also rejected). They presented an absurd scenario based upon the Torah's instructions concerning the mandate of a levirate marriage, wherein the oldest surviving brother of a man who dies childless is obligated to marry his brother's childless widow (with the firstborn child of this union being treated as belonging to the deceased brother). In their example, the widow is found to be in seven childless levirate marriages following her first husband's death. So, whose wife will she be in the resurrection, after being reunited with all eight brothers? Addressing their challenge, our Lord addresses the purpose of marriage as it relates to the mandate to be fruitful for the sake of filling the earth, and then He brings before them the text from our Old Testament lesson, taken from the Book of Exodus, to deal with the matter of death's finality. Jesus draws His answer out from this passage, rather than presenting portions from the writings of the prophets,

because only the Torah, the five books of Moses, were considered to be authoritative by the Sadducees. Turning to the text, Jesus demonstrates that because God is spoken of, by Moses, as being “the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob,” then, “He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him.” This response— that, “[God] is not God of the dead, but of the living”— is recorded for us in all three of the synoptic Gospels; and therefore, perhaps it is repeated with a purpose, so that we should heed our God’s Word as the final word on the subject. Yes, there is, indeed, more to life than this life alone. Indeed, we know that this is a sure word from our Lord because of His own resurrection from the dead, whereby He defeated death by His death and won Life for all who would trust His Word of promise, the good news of God’s gracious plan to pardon us and set us free from the penalty of our sin. We trust that we too, on account of our standing in Christ as His saints, can now stand before a holy God without being consumed by His wrath. Being sons of the resurrection, we have the promise of being raised to Life— freed from the fetters of this world, its devils, and our own fallen flesh. Our faith, as we confess it through our creeds, sets our sight to look forward to beyond death to the resurrection of the dead. Jesus said, “I AM the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.” We believe this and confess it. It is truly sad, you see, that the Sadducees sought to put Jesus to the test. Yet, it is even sadder when we do so.

Do we dare confess that we who confess, “I believe in... the resurrection of the body, and the Life everlasting,” and, “I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the Life of the world to come,” often live our lives as if we were Sadducees. Do we dare admit

that we often live as if this life is all there is, as if there is no afterlife. Yet, being sons of the resurrection, we should repent and believe the good news that the One to whom we were united in Holy Baptism has risen victoriously from the dead, so that we might have Life everlasting and the certainty that these mortal bodies that will die one day will also one day be raised through Him as He Himself declared:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live [...] Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

We do good as we take His Word to heart and, in the words of St. Francis of Assisi, “Wear the world as a loose garment, which touches us in a few places and there lightly.” We do good when we acknowledge that there is much, much more to this life than just this life alone. We do good as we come to recognize that “the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” is *our* God and “He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him.” We do good when we turn from sin, the wage of which is death, and turn in faith to those means by which we find forgiveness. We, being in Christ, being sons of the resurrection, no longer live a life that ends in an empty death, but rather we now die a death that ends in the fullness of endless Life! We do good in confessing that the vanity of this present life will pass, but God’s promise remains.

Dearly beloved of God, in regard to the resurrection of the body, St. Paul tells us that, “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” The Apostle also writes that, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.”

Life. Death. Life after death. We don’t have all of the answers to all of the questions that we might want to ask; however, we do have the answers that we need. We know that a funeral need not serve as a final farewell. We know that the One who has redeemed our bodies lives and that, in the end, according to His Word, even though our flesh may be destroyed, we will see God with our own eyes. Death doesn’t have the last word. God’s Word is the final word. With St. Paul and all the saints who’ve gone before us to be in God’s presence, awaiting the glorious day of the resurrection, let us find comfort in the sure knowledge that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Yes, we die. Yet, we also rise. We rise to new life in the loving presence of the Living God. Let us, therefore, continue in our Christian confession with full confidence: “[We] believe in... the resurrection of the body, and the Life everlasting,” and, “[We] look for the resurrection of the dead, and the Life of the world to come.” Amen.

Now, may the most merciful and gracious promise of the Living God ever keep our hearts and minds at peace in Christ Jesus. Amen.