

## **Sons of the Resurrection**

March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014

Luke 20:27-40

*<sup>34</sup>And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, <sup>35</sup>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, <sup>36</sup>for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. <sup>37</sup>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. <sup>38</sup>Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him."*

Imagine two workers: give them both the same menial, mundane, assembly line job. 9 hours per day, six days per week. Tell the first that at the end of the year, he'll receive \$15,000. Tell the second he'll receive \$15 *million*. Who goes to work with a spring in their step? They have the same circumstances, but that future hope transforms their present attitude towards their work. Your view of the future exercises tremendous power and influence over your choices, thoughts, emotions and actions in the present.

The reality of hope is a crucial element of the Christian faith, and that hope centers on the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. However, as our society becomes increasingly secular and post-Christian, the belief that there is no hope beyond this present life is becoming increasingly prevalent.

It's often said that this is the "modern" approach – primitive people in biblical times believed in things like angels and spirits and miracles and resurrections, enlightened *modern* people do not believe in fairy tales like that – this view is not as modern as today's skeptics like to think it is. In the first century there was a prominent group of religious leaders – the Sadducees – who did not believe in life after death.

### **Another Religious Game: Theological Debate**

And in this section of Luke, which depicts the escalating conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders, it's now the Sadducees' turn to

try to undermine Jesus' influence and popularity with the people (let's note here, briefly, that this is another religious game that people play: the game of theological debate, cf. v.27 & v.33; this is not a sincere question). The debate centered around the subject of levirate marriage, the law that when a Jewish man died childless, his brother was required to marry the widow, and the first son would become the heir of the deceased (Deut. 25:5–10). The Sadducees clearly thought that their hypothetical scenario made nonsense of the doctrine of resurrection.

And as we saw last week, in dealing with a group of very insincere “seekers”, Jesus gives a very wonderful depiction of both the *shape* (i.e., what it's like) and the *reason* (what it's based on) for the hope of Christianity. So let's consider those two points this morning, before receiving the Lord's Supper.

### **The Shape of Christian Hope: Resurrection**

In refuting the hypothetical conundrum that the Sadducees bring, Jesus' response essentially communicates that the Sadducees don't even understand the resurrection that they have rejected!

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Oh my...where do we start?! There are eight messages here that need to be distilled into eight minutes! I think what needs to be said here (see the sermon from 5/12/13 for a more extended reflection on the shape of Christian hope), the big idea, is that the hope of Christianity is not the best of earthly life extended out for eternity (that's what the Sadducees seem to be thinking), but is life on a whole different plane/sphere of existence. “This age” (v.34) and “that age” (v.35) are radically different than anything we can conceive. There is no need for

marriage, because we are immortal beings, equal to (or, like) the angels. The resurrection is beyond your wildest imagination!

When Jesus says, “no marriage in the resurrection, but equal to angels, sons of God,” He is saying (among other things) that the pleasures of “that age” that we will experience are of such a kind that if God tried to explain them to us now, it would be like trying to explain sexual pleasure to a five-year-old. You could try, and the child might nod his head, but then he would say, “Could I have a snack?” So, there will be no marriage there, but the pleasures of marriage, ten-to-the-millionth power, will be there<sup>1</sup>.

If the pleasures of sexual intimacy are just appetizers, what will the feast be like, in the resurrection when you see God face to face, when the Creator of your joy sensors will summon all His creative power and energy to satiate you with all the honor, joy, love, glory and blessing that He can, meeting the deepest needs and longings of your soul, with ever-increasing intensity? On that day, you won’t look longingly back at the life that was, wishing you could have it back.

### **But, Real Continuity**

But as mysterious as the resurrection will be – as much discontinuity as there is between “this age” and “that age” – Jesus, as well as the rest of the New Testament, communicates that there will be real continuity between the life we experience now, and the life that will be ours forever. For starters, Jesus uses the language of *resurrection*. That is the shape of Christian hope...not “going to heaven when I die”, but physical, bodily, resurrection, what one scholar insightfully defines as “life *after* life after death.” That’s what resurrection means: becoming physically alive again, after death.

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, p.128

And Jesus doesn't just teach about the resurrection, but in His own triumph over death He is the firstfruits of the coming resurrection; at His appearing, He will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body. And His glorious resurrection body had many characteristics that are common to our experience:

*"<sup>39</sup>See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." <sup>40</sup>And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. <sup>41</sup>And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup>They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup>and he took it and ate before them."*

Why else would Luke record these details, if not to convince us that resurrection life is (though different, see above) is physical, earthy existence, filled with eating and drinking and running and hugging and laughing and dancing in the Kingdom of our Father. This is the fullest, richest experience of our sonship: "<sup>23</sup>And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." (Paul says in 8:24 that our salvation – bought with Christ's blood – secured this precious hope, which is why it's crucial to know and treasure this)

### **In a Renewed Creation**

That verse points to another facet of our hope, that this bodily experience will be lived out in this physical world, renewed and redeemed to be the playground of the children of God. Paul connects the groaning of our bodies, and their resurrection, with the groaning of creation, and its restoration. What happens to our bodies and what happens to the creation go together. And what happens to our bodies is not annihilation, but liberation.

So it is with the physical world; the bondage to corruption will be consumed in the purifying, liberating fire of God's judgment, but the world will remain, with no more corruption, sin, pain, death or crying. Jesus will, in fact, make all things new, He will make His blessings

flow “far as the curse is found.” In Matthew 19:28, Jesus called this “the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne,” and Peter calls it “the restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets” (Acts 3:21). And what did the prophets anticipate? A world of perfect love, justice and peace between all peoples. A world where all injustice and oppression are banished, where weapons of war and destruction are turned into instruments of peace.

A world where the wolf and the lamb will lie down together, where mountains will break forth into song and the trees of the field will clap their hands. A world without earthquakes and a world free from all disease, a world where every tear will be wiped, where all sorrow and pain will flee away, a world which is filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. This is the hope that Christianity offers:

***What hope does everlasting life hold for us?***

*It reminds us that this present fallen world is not all there is; soon we will live with and enjoy God forever in the new city, in the new heaven and the new earth, where we will be fully and forever freed from all sin and will inhabit renewed, resurrection bodies in a renewed, restored creation.<sup>2</sup>*

## **The Future Shaping the Present**

Before we look (briefly!) at the reason or basis for this great hope that Jesus gives, I said at the start that how you view your future has a powerful effect on the way you live now. How is this amazing hope of resurrection meant to shape your today?

There’s a lot to say, but for today, I’ll just mention that if this is your hope, then you can live this life with no regrets. There are so many people in our culture who are frantic because they’re afraid they’re going to “miss out”. They want a great family, great sex, great travel,

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<sup>2</sup> New City Catechism, 2012, Redeemer Presbyterian Church

great experiences. They want warmth and love and physical beauty and great good and to see all the great sights. And the resurrection says, “You will miss out on nothing!” So relax, sacrifice, be generous, allow others to impose upon you. You don’t need to run around like a madman trying to create your best life now, because the life you’ve always wanted is soon to come, better than you can imagine!

### **The Reason for Hope: A Covenant-Keeping God**

With all we’ve seen, we could easily forget the context here in Luke 20. Jesus has confronted the Sadducees with the fact that they don’t even understand the future that they don’t believe in. But then He goes on to show them why they should believe it. That’s important, right? If you’re going to invest your desires and expectations on something yet to come, in such a way that it’s going to have a powerful effect on the way you live today, you want to know that what you’re hoping in is *real*. So in verses 37-38, Jesus gives an argument for the resurrection. The hope of Christianity is not based on a feeling, but on objective, concrete, historical reasons:

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The point is that if God is your God, then you must be raised. You must live to Him, because He is not the God of the dead! When God says to a person, “I am your God,” (the way He did to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob), He means, “I will always be your God, and no power of hell nor any scheme of man, nor even death itself, can separate you from Me.” That’s what it means for God to be God.

The incident Jesus is referring to comes from Exodus 3, where God appears to Moses and promises that He, in fulfillment to His covenant with the Patriarchs, will act to liberate His people from Egypt and bring them into the Promised Land, as He has promised Abraham. But these

words would be no comfort, would they, if Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were dead? This is God revealing His glory to Moses; saying, "I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob" is not establishing the glory and strength and power of I AM if it's a statement that He is a God of rotting, wasting away corpses!

So Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are not dead; they are alive, even now, in God's presence, their spirits living to Him. And because stage #1 has happened (their souls are live to Him in heaven), you can be sure that stage #2, resurrection, is sure to follow.

### **A Better Argument: Jesus' Resurrected Body!**

That's the basic gist of the argument, but I'm not dwelling on it long, because on this side of the cross and empty tomb, we have a much better argument. Jesus argues the way He does here because the Sadducees embraced only the Torah as authoritative, and because the clearest evidence for a future resurrection was yet to come. The most compelling way Jesus demonstrated the reason for the hope of resurrection isn't something He said, but something He did. He Himself rose from the dead on the third day!

That's clearly what the apostles base their hope on: not on the fact that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are alive to God, but that Jesus defeated death decisively by His resurrection, and has therefore been vindicated as God's Son, Lord of all, and His resurrected body is the firstfruits of the coming resurrection of all who believe: "22For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ."

### **Preparing for the Lord's Supper**

That raises one final matter, that will lead us right into our celebration of the Lord's Supper. How are we assured of this hope? The empty tomb of Jesus is the basis of the Christian hope, but what I mean is,

how do you know this hope is *yours*? Because Jesus makes clear here that this hope is not something that everyone will share in: "35but those who are *considered worthy* to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage..." These words imply that not everyone is going to be counted worthy.

So the final question is, how can one be counted worthy to attain to the age of resurrection? Because when you think about what God is going to do in the age of the resurrection, it becomes pretty clear that you and I are not worthy to be a part of it. I said earlier that when Jesus returns all corruption and evil will be consumed in the purifying, liberating fire of God's judgment: ? "10But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."

You and every thought, intention, desire and word will be exposed. You'll be naked and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom you must give an account. So how can God come to renew the world and purge it of all corruption and sin, without purging it of you and me? Because in thought, word and deed we have chosen self-rule over submission to His wise and loving rule.

It would be impossible, if not for Jesus. In Jesus, the One to whom we must give an account came personally and settled our account, hanging on the cross and bearing the full fury of God's righteous indignation against every rebellious, self-exalting thought, motive and desire. Only by faith in Jesus' finished work can we who deserved to be burned up and dissolved (actually, worse: *eternally* condemned) for our rebellion be welcomed into the New Creation that will never pass away, to eternally admire and enjoy and celebrate the glories of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We can be counted worthy to attain the age of the resurrection, because Jesus was numbered among the transgressors (cf. 22:37). That is where

our Exodus from the slavery of sin, guilt and shame was accomplished, that is how we know that our covenant God is for us, and that His promises will never fail. And that is what we remember when we eat the bread and drink the cup. Let's remember Him together at the Table.