

Taking Jesus As He Is

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Text: Luke 20:27-38

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her." Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

SOME SADDUCEES COME TO Jesus and ask him a long, drawn-out question about resurrection, and there's one commentator who really hit the nail on the head when he said the question was "meant to generate heat not light." These guys aren't looking for any deep insights from Jesus. They just want to discredit him. And the giveaway is the fact that they don't even believe in resurrection. For them, the question is purely academic—like asking how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Another commentator put it like this: "the question comes to Jesus with no personal investment on the part of the investigators; their aim is to argue, to embarrass, to force Jesus into one particular school of thought, or perhaps just to divide the audience. There is among them no spirit of inquiry or desire to learn."

That said, it's easy to vilify the Sadducees and accuse them of acting in bad faith. But to be fair, their belief that the only way to live forever was through your descendants was a much more mainstream idea than the idea of resurrection, which developed later. So, from their perspective, they were simply defending the established view. They were holding onto their traditional teaching. But the problem was, they were holding onto it so tightly that they couldn't even consider any other possibilities. They had their theology all figured out. And Jesus—well, he just needed to fit himself into that framework. And when he wouldn't, when he kept saying things that didn't conform to their understanding, they weren't interested in listening to what he had to say. They were interested in shutting him down.

We should be careful, though, about judging the Sadducees too harshly because

the truth is, we're not that different. We try to fit Jesus into our frameworks. We try to make him conform to our preferences. If we're being honest, we have to admit that, whether consciously or unconsciously, we pick and choose which of his teachings to follow and which of his teachings to ignore. We're happy to love our neighbors, for instance, but our enemies not so much. What we end up doing, though, is creating versions of Jesus who don't ask too much of us, who affirm our choices, who support our beliefs. We take the edgy, radical, boundary-breaking Jesus of the gospels, and we sand down all the rough edges. And in the process, we lose what makes him who he is.

Jesus lived in a way that was consistent with God's kingdom, not our world. He embodied God's way, not our customs and practices. In other words, he didn't go along with the status quo. He questioned it. He disrupted it. He called people to a life that was bigger, a life that was more. And he's still doing that today. He's still refusing to cooperate with our attempts to smooth over the rough spots and make him more agreeable. "Jesus Christ is the Lord of heaven and earth," another commentator said, "and we do not tell him what is or is not the case; rather he reveals it to us."

So, what's Jesus trying to reveal to these Sadducees that they don't want to hear about—and maybe we don't want to hear about either? He's saying that God's vision of what human life can be is far greater than the life we know—which sounds pretty good until you think about the implications.

When they ask Jesus this ridiculous question, the Sadducees are making a big assumption about resurrection. They're assuming it would be nothing more than an extension of this life—same rules, same relationships, same everything. But Jesus is saying no, it's not just more of the same, it's a whole new ball game. It's life with the dial turned all the way up. Life in all its fullness

and all its potential. Life that's not held back by doubt and fear. Life if we could meet every moment with our whole selves and approach every encounter with open hearts and willing hands. And I don't mean someday in the future when we die and go to heaven. I mean right now while we're still walking around on earth. That's the other big assumption the Sadducees make. They assume resurrection only has to do with the afterlife. But it doesn't.

Resurrection is God's power to bring life out of death, hope out of despair, to make a way where there is no way, and that's something we can start experiencing the moment we stop trying to follow Jesus on our terms; the moment we say, "Okay, Jesus, instead of me changing you, I'm going to let you change me." In other words, the moment we let go of whatever's holding us back and start really living our faith.

Which brings us to today—Stewardship Sunday—the day we make our financial commitments to Valley for the coming year. I know stewardship can feel like it has nothing to do with our faith, and certainly nothing to do with resurrection. But what if we frame it differently? What if we see it as a chance to practice what I'm preaching—taking Jesus as he is and letting him shape us into people who live by trust, people who know our lives are in God's hands, and we can depend on God to take care of us? Then stewardship becomes more than just paying the bills. It becomes a spiritual practice—a tangible way we stop trying to make Jesus fit into our little boxes and instead invite him to open our eyes to a whole new reality.

Today we all have the opportunity to make our pledges for the coming year, and I encourage you to approach your decision prayerfully, not asking, "How much can I afford to give?" but "What's God calling me to give?" and "What would it look like to stretch myself, to take a meaningful step toward the life Jesus offers?"

We don't have to be like the Sadducees, so caught up in our own certainty that we can't imagine anything beyond what we already know. Jesus stands before us, just as surely as he stood before them, speaking and embodying truth, and inviting us into something bigger and better than we can imagine on our own. We just need the courage to take him as he is and let him lead us forward.

Pray with me:

God of resurrection and new life, we confess that we often try to make Jesus manageable, to fit him into our comfortable frameworks. Forgive us for sanding down the rough edges, for resisting the fullness of what you offer. Give us courage to take Jesus as he truly is—challenging, expansive, full of grace and mercy. Help us to open our minds and our hearts, to let go of our need for control, and to trust in your abundant provision.

As we make our commitments today, may they be more than financial pledges—may they be acts of faith, steps toward the expansive life you call us to live. Transform us, O God. Stretch us. Challenge us. Change us. And lead us forward into the fullness of life you promise. We pray in the name of Jesus, who reveals to us the truth of who you are. Amen.