

## The Politics of Resurrection

November 6, 2016

Dr. Frank Allen, Pastor

First Presbyterian Church of Kissimmee, Florida

### Luke 20:27-40

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; <sup>30</sup> then the second <sup>31</sup> and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. <sup>32</sup> Finally the woman also died. <sup>33</sup> In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.” <sup>39</sup> Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” <sup>40</sup> For they no longer dared to ask him another question.

SAD

Sadducees.

Well named people. Right?

They said there was no resurrection.

To quote a famous politician, “Sad.”

Who were these sad Sadducees who said their was no resurrection?

They were priests.

They were the chief priests.

And yet they did not believe in resurrection.

As we will see a bit later, they actually made fun of the idea.

More than that, they also did not believe in signs and wonders.  
In other words, they denied the possibility of the miraculous.

They downplayed any talk of God's kingdom.  
They didn't like the idea of a Messiah or a kingdom of God that would come.

In fact, they did not seem to think that God was involved in the world at all.  
If they believed in a "God" they believed in a "God" who wound up the "clock" that is the universe and then walked off and left it.

Change was not possible.  
The kingdom you have is the kingdom you're going to have for the foreseeable future.  
Deal with it.

That was the Sadducees.

That's what you believe if you don't believe in miracles.  
That's believe when you don't believe in resurrection.  
Help is not on the way.  
It's all up to us.

## POLITICS AND RELIGION

Now, you might ask,  
"Who let these guys into seminary?  
How did people with such little faith get to be in charge of the priesthood?"

Politics.

During the Maccabean period, the time period just before the time of Christ, the Sadducees were able to gain power by appealing to nationalism and a phony claim that they were the true heirs to the priesthood.

During Jesus' time they were deeply entrenched in the Temple.

And even though the people may have preferred the other political/religious party, the Pharisees, ... the Sadducees were firmly in charge.

Through a combination of intimidation and power plays these elites had maintained control for many years. And they wanted to stay in charge.

How do you keep and hold power?

You make compromises with the powers that be.  
They made sure that they didn't anger Herod (and especially Rome) when it came to their policies.

And this meant tamping down any talk of a Messiah, or a kingdom that comes, or a God who might intervene in the affairs of men and women. That kind of talk would get them into trouble with Herod and the Romans and cause them to lose their power.

For those who don't believe in resurrection, for those who don't believe in a kingdom that comes ... having and keeping power can be the most important thing in the world.

What we believe about the hereafter affects how we live in the here and now.

We can't say, "thy kingdom come, they will be done" unless we believe that a kingdom is coming. We can't believe in the Christian life, if we don't believe in life eternal.

The old beer commercial summed up this philosophy best.

We only go around once in life so we have to grab for all the gusto (and beer) that we can get. If there is no eternal life, we see no potential beyond the immediate future.

Sad.

## THE GOTCHA QUESTION

People who believe this can be easily swayed.  
That's how cynical politicians got the crowd to ask for the crucifixion of Jesus instead of a thief named Barnabas.

In our day that's how voters can be swayed by negative political ads on TV.

Thought is replaced with emotion.  
What's important is not the truth but appearance.  
According to those who practice the dark art of political advertising, if you can make a person look foolish you have accomplished your purpose.

That's why the Sadducees asked Jesus a question.  
They wanted to make him look foolish so that people would reject what he had to say.

They asked a “gotcha question”.

Once again you need a little background to understand this passage.

In Jesus’ day, it was very important to be remembered by your family.

That’s why genealogies were so important.

You might remember that the gospel of Matthew begins with a long genealogy.

According to Matthew, if you want to understand Jesus, you have to understand who he was and where he came from. And in particular, you need to know that he was from lineage of King David.

We can understand that.

We have that same desire to know and be connected to our history.

Some of you have no doubt logged on to [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) and found out fascinating (and maybe some frightening) things about your ancestors.

It’s a way of connecting with the past, and understanding who we are.

And it’s even become a successful business.

But, in Jesus’ day genealogy was even more important.

For some, eternal life consisted of knowing your heritage and having that heritage continue in the lives of your children and grandchildren.

If you didn’t have children before you died, there would be no one to remember you.

Your genealogy would stop. This was considered to be a great tragedy.

Some might even say that you were cursed by God.

However, in the Jewish law there was a strange answer to this problem.

If a man died before having children, his widow would marry his oldest brother. This served two purposes.

First, it would provide protection for the women in a man’s world. And, second, any firstborn son would be attributed to the genealogy of the deceased brother.

We’re not sure how many of these marriages actually occurred.

There’s evidence in the Bible that there was quite a bit of resistance to this arrangement.

Even in a patriarchal society, people wanted the freedom to choose their mates.

But, the Sadducees pose a theoretical problem based on this obscure law.

Suppose a man who has seven brothers dies with no male child to carry on.

And following the law the oldest brother marries the widow so that she can have a child ... but no luck. And then the oldest brother dies.

And as fate would have it, all the other brothers follow suit.

They all marry this unlucky widow, but she has no children, and all the brothers married to the widow die.

Finally, the widow dies.

The Sadducees ask, "In the resurrection, whose wife will she be? She's been the wife to all seven!"

The Sadducees don't care whose wife she will be.

They just want to make fun of Jesus.

All his talk of resurrection and miracles are a threat to their power so they want to disqualify Jesus (and for good measure their political opponents, the Pharisees as well).

## ALL ARE ALIVE TO GOD

Jesus' answer is short and to the point.

"It doesn't make any difference.

Eternal life will be quite different from this life.

Your question is silly.

Marriage is not necessary in a world where everyone lives forever."

This past week someone showed me a video of a baby that was born by C-section.

The amniotic sack was still intact and the baby was receiving all it needed to live through the umbilical cord. It was amazing.

The child seemed so peaceful in that little cocoon of protection and darkness.

But, in just a few minutes that cocoon would burst and the baby would be thrust into the light of a complex and difficult world.

That child had no way of knowing how different and amazing the new world would be.

Only birth would allow that to happen.

In the same way, we will not fully understand the nature of eternal life until we are a part of it.

We, as the apostle put it, see through a glass darkly.

However, that does not mean that we have no clue about the life to come.

We are not totally in the dark.

The Bible tells us that the God revealed in Jesus is the God of creation.

God created all that is.

God created us.

And more than that God knows our name.

We are God's children.

We belong to God.

The Sadducees thought that only the first five books of the Bible, the Torah were authoritative and should be considered Scripture. And they could find no evidence of resurrection at all in those books.

Jesus challenges their interpretation.

He said,

“Do you remember that story about Moses and the burning bush?

Do you remember the part where God identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

Well, God is the God of the living not the God of the dead.

So, it's a different ballgame when it comes to the Creator of heaven and earth.

All are alive to him.”

I think this is a verse that we don't talk about enough.

Think of the importance of this statement.

All are alive to God.

That changes everything.

## SAINTS AND SADDUCEES

Last Tuesday we celebrated All Saints Day.

We celebrated the fact that all are alive to God.

Eternity unrolls like a great scroll for the Creator of heaven and earth.

And we are a part of that saga.

Last Tuesday the past, the present and the future came together in a story of salvation and hope.

So does that make this Tuesday?  
“All Sadducees Day”?  
Maybe.

Do we believe that the only kingdoms that matter are the kingdoms of this world?  
Do we believe that power must be maintained by any means possible?  
Do we believe that our faith has to take a back seat when it comes to politics?

Then we have joined the Sadducees.

But, all is not lost.

The anxieties of this moment can cause us to ask some needed questions.  
What is really important in life?  
What is eternal?

No matter how the election goes many Christians will be bitterly disappointed.  
As it always happens in an election year people of faith and good will see things differently.

But, I hope we can agree on one thing.  
The fate of the world is not in our hands.  
It's in God's hands.

In life and in death, we belong to God.  
The end of the world will not come because a particular politician is elected.

Politicians come and go,  
And sometimes the harder politicians try to hold on to power the more it slips through their fingers.

The Sadducees were so desperate to maintain their power that they were willing to kill an innocent man. In John's gospel, the high priest Caiaphas speaking of Jesus said, “It's better for one man to die for the people than for a whole nation to be destroyed.”

And when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, guess what the Sadducees wanted to do? They wanted to kill Jesus and Lazarus.

No unsanctioned resurrections were going to happen on their watch!

Of course the Sadducees seemed to get their way.  
They manipulated the Roman governor, they riled up the crowd, and they got Jesus crucified.

They thought that was the end of it.

But, no, the stone was rolled away.  
The Roman guards told some crazy story about resurrection.  
And so the Sadducees tried to pay them off and made up a story about the disciples coming and stealing the body.

But, still the story wouldn't die.

In Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles disciples who used to be scared of their own shadow are on the steps of the Temple preaching.

And what is their message? Resurrection.  
"Jesus has been raised from the dead," they said.

And who's there to try and stop them?  
You guessed it. The Sadducees.  
They threw Peter and John in jail for preaching that message.

When Stephen spoke about the resurrection, what did the Sadducees do?

The same thing they did to Jesus; they got false witnesses to say that he was preaching destruction of the Temple and their way of life.  
And so they stoned Stephen.

But, still the story didn't die.

One of the people watching that day was a man named Paul.  
He approved of the execution of Stephen.  
Resurrection was a danger said Paul.  
And Paul, a Pharisee even joined with the Sadducees in trying to stamp out those who believed.

But, a funny thing happened on the road to Damascus. This dangerous resurrection story confronted Paul on the road to killing others.

When Paul met Jesus on that road, he was resurrected. He was changed from chief persecutor to chief apostle.

And in a few years it was Paul who was preaching this message of resurrection far and wide.

The Sadducees hired some “hit men” to kill Paul.  
The Bible tells us that they vowed not to eat or drink until the job was done.

Apparently they must have died of starvation because in the next chapter we learn that Paul is alive and well. You’ll never guess who started telling lies about Paul before the Roman governor.

Right again.  
The Sadducees.

The Sadducees wanted the man who preached this resurrection message killed at all costs.

They eventually got their way.  
Paul was executed.

But, before that happened, while he was in prison Paul wrote letters that were circulated all over the ancient world. Some of them are now part of our New Testament. The story spread like wildfire.

They tried to kill the story of resurrection by killing Paul.

But, the story didn’t die.

The Sadducees died.  
The thing the Sadducees feared the most happened.  
In 70 AD their political kingdom came to an end.

Someone claimed to be a Messiah.  
They rebelled against Rome.  
And Rome showed no mercy.

The Temple was destroyed and along with it the Sadducees.  
These politicians who wore their “religion” on their sleeves were relegated to the dustbin of history.

And what happened to those who carried the message of the resurrection?  
They carried on.  
And we still carry on.

## THE POLITICS OF RESURRECTION

The politics of resurrection still trumps the politics of the day.

This past week NPR interviewed two Roman Catholic nuns.  
One was stationed in Cleveland, and one was stationed in Chicago.

You know where this is headed.  
One was delighted in the results of the World Series.  
And one was heartbroken.

But, there was no bitterness in their discussion.  
Just good natured banter.

We knew why.  
When all was said and done they were on the same team. The resurrection team.

Oh, if only the same could be said of this Tuesday!  
The Sadducees have done all they can to poison the well.

But, we have a secret.  
No matter what happens we're on the same team.

We're a part of the resurrection party.  
We believe that God's ability to save is greater than our ability to destroy.

Who knows?  
Maybe one of our candidates will meet the risen Lord on the road to the White House. That's not a joke. That's my honest and fervent prayer.

I would invite you to practice the politics of resurrection this week.  
Vote your conscience, but remember that there are fellow Christians who believe very strongly the other way.

Temper your celebration or your grief with the knowledge that in the end we are all part of the resurrection party. And one day that resurrection party will have a grand celebration, and everyone will be invited.

There will be people from the east and the west. There will be people from the north and the south. There will even be Republicans and Democrats!

All will be invited to the table of grace and forgiveness.

We look forward to that grand Day by taking the Lord's Supper. We also call it Communion because it is the meal that brings us together as children of the resurrection.

I know.

It's hard to see now.

But, one day the Apostle tells us we will see.

We will see face to face.

Amen.