

## **Luke 20:27-38 The Message (MSG)**

### **All Intimacies Will Be with God**

**Narrator:** Some Sadducees came up. This is the Jewish party that denies any possibility of resurrection. They asked Jesus a question.

**Sadducees:** Teacher, Moses wrote us that if a man dies and leaves a wife but no child, his brother is obligated to take the widow to wife and get her with child. Well, there once were seven brothers. The first took a wife. He died childless. The second married her and died, then the third, and eventually all seven had their turn, but no child. After all that, the wife died. That wife, now—in the resurrection whose wife is she? All seven married her.

**Jesus:** Marriage is a major preoccupation here, but not there. Those who are included in the resurrection of the dead will no longer be concerned with marriage nor, of course, with death. They will have better things to think about, if you can believe it. All ecstasies and intimacies then will be with God. Even Moses exclaimed about resurrection at the burning bush, saying, ‘God: God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob!’ God isn’t the God of dead men, but of the living. To him all are alive.”

### **Faith of the Saints**

One of the distinctions that Methodists have from Catholics has to do with the definition of *saint*. In the Catholic Church one must be officially canonized to be considered a saint in the proper sense, and one is usually dead before one is canonized. In the Methodist Church, all Christians are saints – you’re not canonized, and no one votes on whether you should become a saint, and you’re not given any particular title that corresponds to your sainthood - you’re not the patron or matron saint of anything (although I think it’s fun to ask yourself if you *were* the saint of something what would it be? Gary might be the patron saint of sports fans. Dottie the matron saint of coffee cakes. Tom and Diane are the patron and matron saints of tranquility). There are no special feasts named after you, but you are loved by many and most importantly you are loved by God.

No, the only qualification you have that affords you the title ‘saint’ is FAITH in Jesus Christ. And while I say that faith is the *only* thing that qualifies us for sainthood, *faith is a big thing*. Jesus says that faith the size of a mustard seed can

move mountains, so don't disparage your faith if it's only a little. Even a little means a lot, because not everyone has faith, and not everyone has a mature faith. We see that played out in our reading today.

There is sect of Jews, many of them in the ruling class, who were called Sadducees, and the text tells us that they did not believe in a resurrection. I know that there are lots of Christians today who don't believe in a resurrection, which is a difficult position to hold considering the Easter is all about Jesus' *resurrection*, and there are numerous passages in the New Testament that say that you and I will share in the resurrection. We're really not sure what that will be like because accounts of Jesus after the resurrection are quite mysterious; it was hard for people to recognize that it was still Jesus and his body was able disappear and reappear and walk through doors, yet it was still a body; John records that after his resurrection Jesus sat on the beach and ate breakfast with his disciples. Ghosts don't eat breakfast.

It seems easier for people to believe in some separation of body and soul, so instead of a resurrection there is this idea that our soul sheds our body when we die and goes to a place called heaven, which I suppose is possible but it begs the question: what was the point of God creating the universe if in the end we end up being disembodied spirits? Jews have always asserted the goodness of physical creation, so to imagine that we live on after death as some sort of spirit would have been absurd to any good Jew. The Sadducees did not like either the idea of resurrection or the idea of heaven. Instead they held what was the tradition Jewish belief that the soul goes to Sheol after death, and though the soul technically *lives* in Sheol it is not exactly *alive*; it's more *asleep eternally*. This afterlife is of no consequence for anyone alive, and only God is eternal.

But a new idea sprang up in Judaism starting around 500 B.C. and developed into the time of Jesus, and that was the notion of *resurrection*. God asks Ezekiel of these dry bones can put on flesh, and God proves that they can. Isn't it possible that God can resurrect the dead? *This belief in resurrection represents a huge evolution in faith, because it assumes a tighter relationship between God and humanity*. If humanity just dies and sleeps in some subterranean world, the assumption is that the relationship between God and humans comes to an end when our bodies die. Resurrection implies that the relationship is not over with death. There may be a break between part 1 and part 2, but the relationship between God and humans continues indefinitely.

And I say that this notion of resurrection was a huge leap of faith because it is trusting that God *wishes* to have a continued relationship with humans. The Sadducees had not made this leap of faith – that’s why they were sad, you see? They didn’t think of God as a God who was concerned about our eternal life, but Jesus as well as others were saying that it is God’s will that we should dwell with him eternally, and yes it will be here on earth. I know that this belief in a physical resurrection raises all sorts of practical questions, and the Sadducees question to Jesus was actually a very good question – I’ve had widows ask me a similar question about what will happen in heaven when their first husband meets their second husband. Others wonder, if God’s intention is to save all people from hell or death how is this world going to accommodate the hundreds of billions of people who have existed since the beginning of time? Maybe that’s one reason so many people prescribe to the idea of a spiritual heaven because spirits don’t take up much space.

But if there is anything that faith teaches us it’s that God can do all things! We have to stop thinking in terms of our everyday experience when we think about God – Jesus tells the Sadducees as much; “you will no longer be concerned about marriage or death when you are in the presence of God.” You need to think differently when you think about the realm of God.

And I encourage you to do the same! Part of the reason you’re here today is to celebrate those who have gone ahead of us, and who knows; they may be celebrating in a place called heaven, and they may be waiting for the final resurrection when we will all be like Christ after his resurrection, and it may be both. *With God all things are possible, and we may not even be able to imagine what this new life will be like any more than an unborn child would know what light and color and food and friendship and laughter are like.* We just know that it will be glorious because the God in whom we believe is glorious. Let us pray that our faith would not be limited by the limited scope of things we see in the here and now. Let us pray that our faith would rest in a God who is forever exceeding our expectations. Amen.