



THE THIRD SUNDAY OF END TIME – SAINTS TRIUMPHANT

What Happens When You Die?

Luke 20:27-38 (NIV)

²⁷ Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. ²⁸ “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. ³⁰ The second ³¹ and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. ³² Finally, the woman died too. ³³ Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?” ³⁴ Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵ But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶ and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection. ³⁷ But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ ³⁸ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

What happens when you die? On a late night talk show, Keanu Reeves was asked this question. He paused, breathed out a deep breath, and answered, “I know that the ones who love us will miss us.” The answer hung in the air for a moment and then applause followed. The host smiled and extended his hand to Keanu. No further questions were asked.

Keanu gave an answer, but was it really an answer to the posed question? He told us what would happen with other people when we die but not what happens to us. Granted, this is a hard question. I think all of us would have to take that deep breath and exhale before answering. Even if we know the answer, there is a part of us that wonders if we should say what we believe about death and the afterlife. It’s a question that we can’t answer with personal experience. How would you even prove the existence of an afterlife? To the one who observes death, you know that you feel sad, that you miss the person. You can observe the body being lifeless, decaying, the cold and almost alien touch of the person’s skin which hits it home that whatever they were, they are now not.

Because of the limitations of what we can observe, we get that there are people who believe that when we die we simply cease to exist. There’s no afterlife. There are no second chances. You are simply gone. This is what the Sadducees, a sect within the Jewish religion, believed. Luke tells us that the Sadducees “say there is no resurrection.” (verse 27)

In our creeds, we confess that we believe in the resurrection of the dead, but what even is the resurrection? Resurrection is bringing life back to something that is dead. No, this is not like zombies or Pet Sematary or Frankenstein, some abomination of pseudo-life. The resurrection that God teaches is a full restoration of the body never to die again.

Maybe because they hadn’t seen it, but the Sadducees didn’t believe such a thing would happen. This means that when they created this scenario about seven dead brothers and this woman and asking whose wife she will be at the resurrection, they didn’t really want an answer. They brought this up because they thought the resurrection was pretty stupid and so are you if you believe in it.

The question remains: What happens when we die? If we go with what life experience has taught us, we must be cautious because we know that our eyes can deceive us; so we can’t trust them. If we use our emotions to determine truth and fact, what happens when our feelings change? Our feelings are fickle. They can lead and have led each of us down the wrong path at some point. Our feelings can deceive us; we can’t trust them either. Numbers, statistics, maybe we can find an answer in those as to what happens to us when we die. Except, numbers have been twisted to make conclusions contrary to reality; they deceive us too. Science. Science is the answer. Except science evolves and changes and does not remain constant. What was true 100 years ago according to science is no longer true according to science. None of these ways are 100% reliable when it comes to determining truth.

If you look at all these methods of determining truth, there is a common theme: they all come from us. What if there is a reliable source that exists, a source that has never once been wrong, a source that has predicted future events and every time has predicted them accurately and correctly? What if there is an all knowing being who is incapable of lying or deceiving? Because that is God.

God has told us what happens to us when we die. He has told us that there is life after death. Jesus proves this point by referencing the Old Testament of the Bible when he said, “But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’” (verse 37) Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not cease

to exist when they died. Instead, they belonged to God and lived with him. They live with him right now. “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.” (verse 38) There is an afterlife. The one who does not lie has said so.

Outside of our chosen verses today, God has clearly revealed what else happens to us when we die. God teaches us that there is a spiritual component to all of us - this thing called a soul, something that we can't see or empirically test - and this is combined with our physical component - our flesh and blood. When God made us, he made with both the spiritual and physical component together – body and soul. That's what makes us a living being. The body and soul were never designed to be separated.

In the beginning, God created us perfectly so that we would live forever – body and soul always united, always being what we are as a living being. But when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and destroyed our perfection, we all received the consequence of sin which is death. Death is an unnatural rending of the body and soul. The body returns to the dust from which God created it, and the soul returns to God for judgment. There's no in-between, no holding place, no spirit prison, no purgatory, no reincarnation, no soul sleep. You get one life, and after that one life, judgment for your eternal being.

God's judgment of us is pretty straightforward. Those who believe that Jesus lived perfectly for us, died to take away our sins, all the wrongs we have ever done, they are judged righteous based on Jesus' righteous life, his perfection, his pure blood shed in payment for our sins. Because Christ is our atoning sacrifice for sins, God's judgment of us is: not guilty! Judged thusly, we will immediately go to heaven to live with God forever when the body and soul rend at death. The ones who believe this are “those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come,” (verse 35a) worthy because they are clothed with Christ's worthiness. Those who do not believe that Jesus is their Savior or their righteousness, they are condemned to an eternity in hell, away from God and his love as they have already pushed themselves away from it, rejecting it.

The soul separated from the physical body remains in heaven or hell until Christ returns, the Last Day. On that day, Christ raises all the dead – believer and unbeliever alike. The body is restored from its decay, reunited with the soul and the body, and is made immortal, never to die again. This is the resurrection of the dead. Jesus said, “In the resurrection from the dead... they can no longer die; for they are like the angels.” (verse 35,36) Believers in their resurrected body stay with God while the unbelievers go back to hell.

Jesus not only tells the Sadducees that there is indeed an afterlife, but gives insight into how great this afterlife will be for his believers, those who have been and will be judged “not guilty.” He says, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage.” (verses 34-35)

At the risk of sounding like a Fast and Furious movie, family is often the most valued relationship we have – whether that is your relationship with your spouse, your kids, or your friends. But we have to admit that even the best of these relationships have their problems. They do break down. There are fights. There is anger and resentment toward one another from time to time. These earthly relationships aren't perfect. Sin ends these imperfect and flawed relationships as does death. Death ends a marriage – till death do us part. Death ends a friendship here on earth.

Jesus does not point us or the Sadducees to put our hope and our joy in being married or continuing earthly friendships at the resurrection of the dead. Instead, he has us put our hope and our joy in our relationship with our God. Through God's choice of us, of his life substituted for ours, this makes us a part of a family, his family, the greatest family. In baptism, we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and he puts his name on us – in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He adopts us to his eternal family with him and all believers. These are our relationships to come at the resurrection of the dead. “They are God's children,” Jesus says, “since they are children of the resurrection.” (verse 36)

Do we live as if the best relationships are the ones yet to come at the resurrection of the dead or do we think such an idea is absolute rubbish like the Sadducees did? Is it unbelievable, to good to be true?

God has never lied to us and never once been wrong in what he has said. He has told us what happens when we die. Will you listen to him? Will you believe him? Because he has shared this answer with you so that you have something sure and solid to hope in and to look forward to. As much as you love people here on earth, at the resurrection of the dead, these relationships will be better. In fact, these will be the best, the most perfect relationships we will have ever had and they will last forever as we stay together as one big, happy family with God. Trusting in Christ and his righteousness, you know that after your death, at the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day, you and I will rejoice with all the saints who have gone before us as God's one big happy family forever. Amen.