

Sermon Hope of Resurrection

Luke 20:27-38

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Introduction

Last week we celebrated the feast of All Saints; that is the commemoration of all servants of God who have died in the past. We show our respect for those who died in the faith of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We are also reminded to follow faithfully in their footsteps.

Ofcourse these saints of the past are not just a memory; they live with God. Together with the angels they surround the throne of God to worship him; and they even pray for us. In the book of revelation we get a glimpse into heaven, and there we see under the altar of God, believers in Jesus Christ who have been killed and who pray for the church on earth.

So even at this very moment millions and millions of believers who died in the faith, pray for you. And the angels that surround God's throne, at his bidding take care of you.

1 Questions about resurrection and life after death

The Sadducees who came to Jesus would have mocked all this. They did not believe in resurrection, they did not believe in angels.

How can this be – they were Jews, they had the Scriptures of God, and they did not believe in these important Biblical matters. Well, not so strange of course. In our churches we also know people who have the Scriptures but who have doubts about major issues.

The Sadducees were the political and religious elites of Israel; they were responsible for the relationship with the Roman Occupiers, and for the Temple Worship. And they had been deeply affected by the Greek philosophies of those days. So they only believed from their Hebrew Scriptures what they wanted to believe.

The basic choice the Sadducees had made was to only accept the 5 books of Moses as authoritative, and no other books or traditions. This gave them more flexibility to fully adopt Greek philosophical thinking and mix it with their Jewish religion. And they did not have to live by all the rules and

regulations of those antiquated fundamentalist Pharisees.

The Sadducees hated Jesus as he upset the equilibrium with the Roman occupiers. He had many followers, so the secret police of the Romans was working overtime. Imagine that the Romans would act against Jesus for sedition: then the population might turn against the Romans and against the collaborators, the Sadducees. So they wanted to keep the precarious social and political power balance.

So the Sadducees tried to ask tricky questions of Jesus, to make him look silly in the eyes of his followers.

Think of it! Jesus was preaching resurrection from the dead! For the Sadducees, that was ridiculous. In accordance with the philosophies of those days, that was impossible. Our body is unimportant and bad, and true freedom and salvation means the liberation of our spirit from our body. That was how all intellectuals of those days were thinking.

So how could Jesus preach resurrection of the body? We need to be free from it, not be stuck with it forever!

Now of course the fundamentalists of those days, the Pharisees, had very physical views of eternity. They read their prophets, and those prophets spoke in very physical terms of the coming Kingdom of God. People working on this earth, sitting under their fig trees, people dying at high age, and people marrying and having babies.

For the liberal Sadducees this fundamentalism was unacceptable. And because Jesus spoke of the resurrection of the body, they assumed he had similar views as the Pharisees.

In line with their focus on the first 5 books of the Bible, the Pharisees used an example from the laws of Moses to show how this idea of eternity was impossible.

Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. And the second and

the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. Afterward the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.

The Sadducees were right of course; if God himself through Moses commanded brothers to marry the wife of their brother who passed away, and if in the afterlife all the faithful live on earth, marrying and living long and happy lives, then this leads to ridiculous situations.

The fundamentalism of the Pharisees, taking all things in the Bible as literal descriptions, is anti-intellectual and goes against the meaning of God's Word. The Sadducees were right in their critique.

But Jesus did not buy into this fundamentalism of the Pharisees when he was speaking of resurrection, and therefore the Sadducees were also totally wrong in their comments.

2 'For God, they are all alive'

Jesus was clever; he wanted to show the Sadducees the reality of resurrection and eternal life with God – and for this he quoted from the book of Exodus, one of those five books that the Sadducees held as the true and only word of God.

When Moses met with God at the burning bush in the desert, God made himself known to Moses. "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

Jesus argues: God is not God of the dead, but of the living. If Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob would be dead and buried and gone, destroyed, non-existent, would God call himself after them?

Each time when we read of God being the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, the context is God being the covenant God for Israel. He eternally loves, and blesses, and protects and He cares for his people. His goodness to people does not suddenly stop when they are dead and buried. His love for us never stops and extends over our moment of dying.

Also, God connects his name with the Hebrew fathers; not with Plato, not with Greek philosophers, not with any of the modern philosophers or religious leaders who do not fully embrace God as revealed in these Hebrew Scriptures.

The Scriptures show us that God made us, soul *and body*. God is the creator of your body. We have to love him even with the strength of our bodies. Our service to him is not in the mind only, it is

with all that we are. And he loves us with all we are. He loves you for your mind, your thinking, for your heart, and also for the body that you have. God made it, it is great!

Your body is created by God, it is the temple of the holy spirit; it is loved by God. That is why we must take very good care of it. All we are belongs to God. That is why I try to lose some weight – because being overweight is not taking good care of what belongs to God.

God is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Note how the word 'God of' is repeated three times. Grammatically this was not needed, but Jesus does this in accordance with Exodus 3:6, to stress that God personally relates to each of those fathers. Would this God leave their body to the worms? He will not, Jesus says. One day not only their spirit will be with God, but even their bodies will be gloriously resurrected.

God is not a God of dead people, he is a God of the living, and Jesus adds, 'for all live to him', 'for him all are alive'. And this is the central concept here. God knows those who belong to Him. He relates to his children. Impossible, impossible for this relationship to be terminated at death. All who died in the faith live for God. They are alive in his presence.

Jesus brushes away the silly question about marriage in eternity. Their will not be marriage – why should there be. We will all live in a fully unique relationship with God only, and we will all love each other equally.

Jesus contradicts the Pharisaic fundamentalism here. Life in eternity will be very different from their literalistic concepts of living long on earth, and then dying at high age. There will not be death, and so marriage – to create a new generation of people – will also be unnecessary.

But do not think that there will not be a physical aspect in eternity – God draws us into eternity with all of what we are, body and spirit. We will be new people, perfect, but not unrelated to who we have been on earth. So what we do on earth is highly important. Your mind, your body, your feelings, let it all be for God.

3 The community of saints

Of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we read that they are alive for God. They surround Him. And not just

they, but all who have passed away as servants of God. All servants of God who died are with Him now, worshipping Him with the angels and with all the company of heaven.

All servants of God are alive with him.

And so are you, alive with God, before Him. Our apostle Paul writes wonderful words in his letter to the Ephesians, 2:4-6:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Here and elsewhere in the letters of the apostles we see that even today, we are also alive with Christ, seated with him in the heavenly places. Seated in heaven. That is an amazing thought.

Especially when we come and participate in Holy Communion, when we kneel at the throne of grace where God stretches out his arms to us, we celebrate that we are with God, together with all the saints of the past.

That is why in the words we use before taking communion, we are reminded that we worship God with all the company of heaven.

Conclusion

We are one community, with Abraham, Sarah, and Moses, and Zippora, with Elijah, with Rahab, with Ruth, with Jeremiah, with Mary the mother of our Lord, with the apostle Paul, with Saint Kyrillos, with that Christian friend of you, that family member who died too young. With that baby that you carried but it was never born alive. With your parents who have passed away.

We are one community of believers. And with the angels and archangels, with St Michael and with the angels that take care of you, we together worship God, Father Son and Holy Spirit.

And with all those people who died in faith in Jesus Christ, we expect the resurrection of our bodies. To be with each other and to be with God. That is our great hope; that is our future, and even our present. We are alive before Him. So let us do that in a manner that honors him. **AMEN**