

In her book *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen begins by stating, “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”¹ There are quite a few men that must be in want of a wife after last night’s Astro’s game. What an amazing win! Back to *Pride and Prejudice*, in her sarcasm, Austen pokes fun at society’s obsession with romantic affairs. People are constantly wondering which person is another’s soul mate. Magazines, plays, and television shows are written around matters of the heart. Very rarely is there a show that explores our eternal relationship with the divine as the main part of the plot.

Austen’s quip could easily have applied to the Sadducees from so many years before as well, who were obsessed with earthly matters. The Sadducees were used to people who believed the world that continues after this one was simply a better version of the world where we live today.² Their imagination was that eventually they would die to go to an afterlife similar to earth without all of the trappings. Perhaps this is a version of immortality that you have heard or even shared.

It is certainly not one that is without its followings today. yet, in our text, Christ tells us, “They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage.”³ I do not think that Jesus is saying marriage does not matter, instead, I believe that he is saying that our eternal life, or rather our immortal life in God is not what we are imagining it to be. Once we die, our relationship with God is about that holy relationship alone.

Still, at this time, both the Sadducees and Pharisees had a great deal of influence in their current culture. The Sadducees, who did not believe in an afterlife are heckling Jesus that this afterlife must look like earth. Their minds cannot comprehend that the afterlife at all much less that it is something different altogether.⁴

The answer Jesus gives in return is not necessarily the beginning of the debate that they are looking for, instead, the Sadducees are encouraged to look beyond their imaginings. They are told that the resurrection to which Jesus speaks is held up by teachings in their Holy writings.

The Sadducees comments were not surprising given that there was an incredible diversity of thought in Judaism at the time, just as there is a diversity of thought based on Christian beliefs. In Jesus’ time, everyone focused on the Torah, and all believed in the importance of worship. The Sadducees have set a trap for Jesus: a woman, who is part of a man’s possessions, can only belong to one person in the hypothetical afterlife.⁵

Jesus however, when answering their question points out that the woman and men in question belong to only one thing: that is God alone. Now, we may disagree; the joke I heard about Episcopalians in my confirmation class stands true: if you want three opinions on something gather two Episcopalians. Still, I believe that all of us think our souls are only ever tied eternally to God. Between us, we have an eternal connection to God. Our relationships on earth, including our marriage relationship, enhance the relationship that we have with God.

¹ Austen, J. (1813). *Pride and Prejudice*.

² Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

³ Luke 20:35

⁴ Brooks, K. (2022). Commentary. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-32-3/commentary-on-luke-2027-38-5>

⁵ Stone, M. (2020). *Living on the Plain*. New York: Church Publishing

Both the Sadducees and the Pharisees had a lot of power in Jesus' time. They were the leading theologians, and both of them sought to catch Jesus in a trap. Unfortunately, for them that was not going to happen because Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies, the anointed one, the embodied scriptures and knew their intentions and the answers to the questions that they did not think they were seeking.

Throughout Holy Scripture, we see that Jesus opposes those in power, this time it is the self appointed guards of the temple. With his comments about resurrection, Jesus is saying that all who cling to these earthly ways are unable to fully comprehend what is to come next in our journey with God. Jesus finds fault with the question, not only because it is meant to trap him, also because there is so much more for all of us to discover.

When I talk with people about what comes next in life after they die, the question often centers around heaven. Today, on the Sunday when later the church will celebrate All Saints and Souls, that seems appropriate. We wonder where and how our lives will be for eternity. Jesus tells us to focus on resurrection instead,⁶ and for understandable reasons, this can make us feel a bit out of sorts. Afterall, the idea of a bunch of bodies coming out of the graves sounds creepy to say the least.

Still, it is the way we live that drives us toward resurrection. Are we not called to live in a manner that embodies the teachings of Christ? When Jesus tells the Sadducees that they are focused on the wrong things, I think part of the challenge for them is that they are not focused on the right things.

The Sadducees are puritanical in their learnings of scripture: they want to follow the letter and not always the spirit of the laws. This is not much different from the Pharisees. Then the Sadducees want to guard the temple, however, they are missing the living temple in front of them. As a priest in the Diocese of Texas puts it, "In the Lord, life is not ended, but changed. Eternal life and eternal love are about choosing to practice loving justice, mercy, and dignity."⁷ Jesus is calling us to be more loving, forgiving, open, and thoughtful rather than to be more embedded in condemning others.

With Jesus' words in Luke today, the resurrection can be reimagined. It is not a time of a wife having to choose between her multiple husbands. Can you imagine there are seven men in heaven fighting over this one woman? Or at least perplexed by the situation. The Sadducees likely got this from a passage in Tobit,⁸ however, what they were testing was not scriptural knowledge. Jesus called them to look into their hearts and see that the heavenly creator has in store for all of us is about abundance rather than scarcity.

⁶ Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

⁷ Stone, M. (2020). *Living on the Plain*. New York: Church Publishing

⁸ Stone, M. (2020). *Living on the Plain*. New York: Church Publishing

There is never a lack of love when it comes to being in the presence of God for eternity. The disagreements that we live with today are not needed in heaven. To put it in terms we all understand: love is all there is. Yet, it is not the romantic love. All the pleasures and joy imaginable come straight from God in heaven. Jesus takes the foundations of scripture that the Sadducees would have understood, to make comparisons between earthly and resurrected life. In this passage, Jesus ignores the idea of the afterlife and skips to eternity. The reason is that it is what the Sadducees and in truth are really wondering about. When we ask how we will spend eternity Jesus wants us to know: in complete love with the Father.⁹

We might ask ourselves what the best way to respond to the idea of resurrection, how we can calm our nerves about how we will spend eternity.

As Christians, we are in possession of great treasure: the knowledge of Jesus' eternal love for us. This gift is meant to be shared through love, justice, mercy, and kindness with all we encounter. When we do this, we will be in want of nothing.

⁹ Edwards, J.R. (2015). The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke. Nottingham: Apollos.