

A Future of Resurrection
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A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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Luke 20:27-38

How do they take selfies in heaven? Do you think the food they eat is organic? Since they are all so righteous and so well-deserving, how do you reckon they decide who gets control of the TV remote? Or does everyone have their own TV? And surely there have got to be better options than Hulu or a dish or basic cable, right?!? Are there uniforms? And where do they sleep, and what are their family dynamics like, and how do they know where they are supposed to be, and how do they get from place to place, and are Ted Danson and Kristin Bell as charming up there as they appear to be on TV?

Admittedly, these are ridiculous questions. Why would any of these things matter in a new dimension – that could be a space, or a place, or a time, or something we haven't even thought of – why would any of these things matter in a new dimension that is completely different from the one we experience now?

In today's text, and in many throughout the Second Testament, the Pharisees and Sadducees ask some pretty ridiculous questions. But don't be too hard on them. Some of their denseness and stubbornness is intentional – the authors of our gospels wrote the stories that way. And if we're honest with ourselves, we're not too different from them. Because lemme tell you, I know I've asked some ridiculous questions in my lifetime. We all have. Because all too often, we project the rules, regulations, and requirements of the here and now upon the future. And such projections, no matter how sincere, temper and dilute the full possibilities of God's bright, loving, and inclusive future.

The Pharisees and Sadducees lived in a time where women had zero social status. They could not own property, nor could they inherit it. Therefore, a woman's economic stability was dependent upon either being married, or having a male heir. If she were widowed, and without such an heir, Jewish law required her closest male in-law to marry her, and therefore provide for her welfare. This was known as levirate marriage.

Both groups of men, were earnestly and sincerely seeking to live out Torah. Not day by day, but minute by minute. And I think it's fair to say that they often missed the forest, that is God's wholeness, for the tree, that is regulations intended to sharpen one's awareness of God.

The two groups also had a significant point of disagreement: the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees believed in resurrection. The Sadducees didn't.

Finally, both groups, who were very powerful, and exerted much social influence, found the teachings of Jesus to be a little too provocative, and a little too threatening to their status in the community. In scenes not too different from the recent Democratic debates, both parties would often ask Jesus trick questions in hopes of trapping him into statements that would anger his opponents, and alienate him from the community of believers.

Today's divisive, completely ridiculous question is: "If you are married seven times on earth, who's gonna be your husband in the next world?"

And this is what's great about Jesus. He simply refuses to engage in these kinds of arguments. Here on earth, in this economy, and in this government, and in this system, there are rules you abide by. You give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and you give to God what is God's, and you live as has been accorded. But the world you are talking about, the future you are talking about is God's. And when we become God's children, our value is no longer bound to the standards of this world, but rather it's bound to the standards of God's world. And if our value is based in God, it is, thankfully, no longer tied up in whom we are married to, or not married to.

Jesus does tip his hand regarding resurrection. Yes, he believes God's resurrects God's people. But Jesus doesn't exhaust his time deciphering the details. Jesus simply recounts that Moses met the God of the matriarchs and patriarchs, and that their spirits were present. Therefore, God's resurrecting powers are evident, both in the living and the dead. In so doing, Jesus uses Torah as his basis, satisfying the Pharisees, but not engaging in a game of tedious explanations.

Here's what I think is happening. Not just in today's story, but here in our time, all throughout our city.

I think that all of our conversations are focused on what we have. And how our systems, “the levirate marriages” of our time, will preserve what we have. And I think this is most true for people of privilege. When we think about the future, we’re spending way too much time thinking about what we’ll have. As individuals, it’s our health, and our wealth, and our status. As a church, it’s how many people will sit in the pews, and how much money will fund our operations, and how much social capital and influence we’ll be able to exert in the propagation of our own gospel. As a city, it’s how many hotel rooms we’ll offer for visitors, and how many miles of transit and rail we’ll build, and how many square feet of office space we’ve got, and how many educated workers, and how many high-paying jobs, and what kind of a ranking we’ll have on Forbes’s latest list.

But Jesus raises his hand. And he tells us to stop making the future about what we’re gonna have, and start making it about what we’re gonna be.

What we’re gonna be, friends, is God’s. And that friends, is resurrection. Resurrection, no matter how you wanna look at it, whether it’s overcoming death on a physical cross, or in a more metaphorical sense if that makes you feel better, or in the presence of the spirits of matriarchs and patriarchs, or simply as a child of God caring more about the connection with the divine and less about the particulars. No matter, we have always been, and we are being, and we’re gonna keep on being God’s. God is resurrecting us. Always.

And if that’s the case, then our future, our resurrection, is about who we are gonna be. As individuals, we are gonna be God’s children, who love God and love neighbor, more than things. As a church, we are gonna be God’s children, who see every conversation, every interaction with neighbor as an opportunity to be aware of God’s divine, fulfilling, loving, wonderful presence, born out in all of God’s creatures. As a city, we are gonna be God’s children, who build an infrastructure, not on the backs of those who serve us, and host us, and transport us, and educate us, and take care of our children, and do all the things that allow the privileged to thrive, but instead an infrastructure built for and in response to the neighbors who need it most.

Sardis Baptist Church, God’s future is not about preserving what we have in the present. God’s future is about opening ourselves to becoming God’s

people...loving people, hopeful people, generous people, empathetic people...Resurrected people!!!

I think that future starts at a table. Friends, may the bread and cup open our eyes to the possibilities, the wonderful possibilities we can experience as God's resurrected people. Amen.