

One Final Riddle

Luke 20:27-44

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for February 11, 2024

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The Sadducees, along with the Pharisees, have completely failed trying to stump Jesus yet again. They thought they could tangle Him in a political web, but Jesus outsmarted them. And now, the Sadducees take one more attempt at trapping Jesus by asking Him an absurd hypothetical about the afterlife. Jesus' response to them reminds us that it's past time to make sure we are confident in our eternal future.

I came into my office yesterday to finish working on my sermon and sitting on my desk was a stack of thank-you notes from children and students at a local Christian school. Evidently, they had a class project for each grade where the students wrote a note to their pastor.

The older students wrote extemporaneously, while the younger elementary students filled in the blanks on a form. The questions were, "Thank you for _____" and then "My church is special because _____."

These notes actually touched my heart and I paused and thanked the Lord for these students and their teachers. I thought you might enjoy some of them.

A 2nd grader named Eleanor wrote, "Thank you for teaching me stuff about God." I loved that theological language.

Madeline wrote, "Thank you for being my pastor. God definitely chose the right career for you." After 37 years, that was reassuring.

This note made me wonder what kids pick up on. Amelia Rose in the 3rd grade wrote, "Thank you for being my pastor and for showing up at church even when you're tired." How did she know?

Connor in kindergarten filled in the blank, "My church is special because ..." and he wrote, "Because of the music." A kindergartener! We can say amen with him!

Jack, another kindergartner filled in the blank, “Thank you for the playground.” He told the truth.

James, a 4th grader, filled in the blank, “My Church is special because it’s like a family to me.” Isn’t that great?

Then there were some notes from students that showed we were kindred spirits.

Blake, a second grader wrote, “Thank you for making your sermons funny.” Isn’t that great? Second graders get my humor!

Adam wrote, “Keep up the good work in teaching the gospel and telling a joke every so often—don’t stop that!”

Now, they never said what it was they thought was funny.

But Luke did, he wrote, “I enjoy listening to your jokes about how much you hate cats—thank you.” He’s my favorite church member now.

Two more quick notes from older students that were especially meaningful. An older student named Carley wrote, “Your sermons have convicted me many times and I have never felt closer to God than in those moments.”

Samara wrote, “One time you said, ‘If you were being tried for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to indict you?’ Thank you for these powerful words and sermons which often leave me longing for more in my relationship with Christ.”

I realize that reading these could come across as self-serving and that’s not my intention.

But they struck me, especially as I was studying this particular passage in Luke’s Gospel for our time together today; it just washed over me with sadness that right about now, after several years in the preaching ministry of the Lord—the Master Teacher, the Divinely Insightful Preacher, the Redeemer—that by now, He should be knee deep in thank-you notes.

Instead, His followers will soon thin out, and in the next day or so, He will be left alone. For Him there were no thank-you notes, and being fully God, but at the same time fully human, He felt that; He knew that.

We’ve watched Him ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and break out into literal sobbing, not because He wasn’t thanked—it was deeper than that—He was weeping because of the nation’s final rejection and all that it would mean.

Let’s be clear: Jesus didn’t do anything to be thanked, He didn’t need to be; He was eternally and sufficiently self-satisfied. We call this the doctrine of aseity.

But don't overlook the fact that He was also fully human, and He knew He would not be thanked, but mocked and rejected and crucified. And He felt that.

In these days leading up to it, Jesus will be barraged with trick questions and verbal traps to try and trip Him up. We're now in **chapter 20 of Luke's Gospel**—chapter 20 represents a day of questions:

- The Pharisees have come after Him.
- The Supreme Court Justices—the Sanhedrin—have attempted to trap Him.
- The political nationalists—the Herodians—and the Pharisees joined together to try and trap Him with their question about paying taxes to Caesar.

And now, we pick up our study as another group of individuals arrive to try their hand at giving Jesus a riddle that Jesus won't be able to answer.

Now, before we get to their question, Luke's Gospel account briefly describes them **in verse 27:**

There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, ...”

Luke 20:27

The Sadducees are effectively the last group within Judaism to try and trick Jesus, to give Him a riddle He can't solve so that Jesus loses credibility.

They were the priestly party in Israel; they dominated the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council.

Bruce B. Barton, [Life Application Bible: Luke](#) (Tyndale House, 1997), p. 459

They were heavily involved in politics, and since the Roman government assigned the High Priest, the Sadducees made sure that one of their own made it into that position.

The Sadducees managed the temple; they owned the money changing business and the sacrificial system.

Because of it, they had become enormously wealthy, and their families were composed of what we would call today “aristocrats.”

The first century Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote that the Sadducees were “boorish in their behavior, and rude among their peers.”

R. Kent Hughes, [Mark: Volume Two](#) (Crossway Books, 1989), p. 107

Today we would call them “religious snobs.” They looked down their noses on the masses and considered themselves superior.

Now as far as Scriptures go, the Sadducees didn’t believe in any Old Testament books beyond the Torah—the first five books of the Old Testament. They ignored the prophets and the poets. They only listened to Moses.

We know from history that Sadducees thought a resurrection was a myth—a fantasy—created by the poor peasants to hold on to, as they hoped for a better world.

Adapted from Barton, p. 459

We also know that the Sadducees didn’t believe in heaven or hell or the existence of angels and demons.

Charles R. Swindoll, [Living Insights: Matthew 16-28](#) (Tyndale House, 2020), p. 174

Once you died, that was it. So, get everything out of life that you can, because it’ll soon be over.

So, as a backdrop to their trick question, keep these three denials in mind:

- Sadducees denied all Scripture except the writings of Moses.
- They denied the existence of angels.
- They denied a resurrection from the dead.

Now the Sadducees had this little riddle that silenced the Pharisees and the other religious leaders who believed in the resurrection.

They’d pull out this favorite question and then laugh over the fact that it stumped yet another religious nut and his view of a future heaven.

And now, these religious snobs think they are about to stump this poor, peasant teacher from the back country of Galilee.

So, here’s their riddle that had never failed them yet in **verse 28**:

... and they asked him a question, saying, “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.”

Luke 20:28

They’re pulling this from **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**—the law of Moses concerning “levirate marriage.”

This was a unique custom for the nation Israel where the nearest of kin would marry a widow whose husband had died without having an heir born to them, and for two reasons:

- to keep the family name alive and
- to keep property and inheritance rights within the family.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 289

You might remember the true romance novel in the Old Testament of a man who did this after he fell in love with the widow. His name was Boaz, and her name was Ruth.

Now by the time of Jesus, for the most part, this law had ceased being practiced.

But to the Sadducees, it was still one of their favorite arguments against the idea of a resurrection to eternal life in heaven.

So, here they go in verse 29; they said to Jesus:

“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 a wife?”

Luke 20:29-33

And you can see these Sadducees holding back their laughter. Seven husbands in a row all died! “Now who will be her husband in heaven?”

I think somebody should be asking, what did she put in their soup?

Number 1 — dies.

Number 2 — dies.

Number 3 — die.

Number 4 — dies.

Number 5 — dies.

Number 6 — dies.

You’re not going to volunteer to be number 7! Wouldn’t you be a little suspicious by now?

Now obviously, the Sadducees have constructed this crazy, hypothetical situation to prove a point; there can’t be a resurrection because something like this would create chaos in heaven.

“So Jesus, tell us, whose wife will she be?”

And Jesus effectively says, “Nobody’s!”

Verse 34:

And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.”

Luke 20:34-36

Jesus is saying in a number of different ways that we are raised to life immortal.

But He’s also correcting the Sadducees by effectively saying here: *You’ve made a huge assumption that relationships in this age are like relationships in the age to come.*

Dale Ralph Davis, Luke: The Year of the Lord’s Favor (Christian Focus, 2021), p 139

But your assumptions are wrong. Relationships are going to be different.

For one, the institution of marriage will not carry over into eternity.

Swindoll, Matthew, p. 177

That doesn’t mean we won’t know who our believing spouses or children are in heaven or believing friends and family members. Our memories aren’t swiped clean, and just as Moses and Elijah came back to meet with the Lord on the mount of Transfiguration—and they were still Moses and Elijah, only glorified—so will you still be you, only perfected and glorified.

And our joy will be great especially for our loved ones in heaven.

While our relationships with our believing spouses will no longer be matrimonial, they will remain uniquely special.

Men, you’ll want to respond to this statement: “Your marriage was made in heaven” amen? Let’s try that again: “Your marriage was made in heaven—amen?” She just might let you watch the Super Bowl after all!

Your marriage was made in heaven, but it was not made for heaven.

Douglas Sean O’Donnell, Matthew (Crossway, 2013), p. 647

He says here that with regards to marriage, in verse 36, we will be like the angels. We’re not going to become angels, but we will be like them.

The apostle Paul would say that we will become like Christ; Jesus was single—unmarried. But since Jesus is the one speaking here, He refers to us becoming like angels, which is true as well.

With this answer, Jesus is pulling back the curtain, so to speak, between earth and heaven.

And I must tell you, it's tempting to stop and begin preaching on the subject of angels, which I can't afford to do, but let me point out some attributes we *will* share with the angels.

Angels are perfected forever in holiness and so shall we be in heaven. Our sinful natures are gone from our new glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15).

Another shared likeness one day is that angels obey God without hesitation.

Kent Hughes writes on this text and says, "The Lord taught us to pray to obey like the angels; He taught us to pray, 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.'"

R. Kent Hughes, Luke: Volume Two (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 275

And how is God's commands accomplished in the heavenly realm? Without hesitation, immediate, joyful, loyal, and complete.

And that's just the beginning, beloved.

Like the angels, our glorified bodies will be healed, perfected, immortal, glorious, shining, noble, fearless, beautiful, and regal.

Hughes, Mark, p. 112

And like the angels, we will be eternally tireless, ageless, delighting forever in the worship and service of our Creator God!"

Swindoll, Matthew, p. 177

It's beyond our imagination. **Which is why the apostle Paul says this of heaven:**

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."

1 Corinthians 2:9

Jesus gives us just a glimpse of our resurrected future here because we've been able to get a glimpse in Scripture, every now and then, of angels.

And Jesus says we're going to be like them in some ways.

But here's the stunning thing that rocks the Sadducees back on their heels; how would Jesus know what the angels are like in heaven? How would He know about marriage and relationships in heaven?

One thing is for sure, the Sadducees aren't going to ask Him because they'd already heard Him say that He'd come from the Father; they knew He could have responded by simply saying: "I know because I used to live there."

He has lived in both worlds; He can speak with authority.

John Phillips, Exploring the Gospel of Luke (Kregel, 2005), p. 250

Remember, the Sadducees didn't believe in angels. And what did Jesus do here? He validated the reality of angels.

Remember, the Sadducees didn't believe in anything outside the Torah, the Books of Moses.

And since there's no illustration of a resurrection in the Pentateuch, well then, they didn't believe in that either.

So, what does Jesus do? He starts quoting from the Book of Exodus, the second Book of Moses in **verse 37**:

"But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him." Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well." For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

Luke 20:37-40

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died long before God showed up and spoke these words to Moses using the present tense of the verb "I am."

J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ (Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 389

Jesus says to them, "Didn't you read what Moses said?"

- God did *not* say to him, "I *used to be* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but they're dead," or:
- "I *wish I still was* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but that day is long gone."

No! "*I am*" the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; why? Because they've been resurrected from the dead.

The Sadducees are stunned; Jesus has trapped them with the words of Moses. They're quiet now, no more questions now!

But at this moment, Jesus goes on the offensive and gives *them* a riddle in **verse 41**:

But he said to them, "How can they say that the Christ is David's son? For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?"

Luke 20:40-44

Jesus is quoting here from **Psalm 110**, a Psalm everyone in Israel recognized as messianic. The Messiah will one day be invited to sit at God's right hand of shared divinity—shared authority.

Adapted from Pentecost, p. 391

So, here's the riddle Jesus gives back to them:

If the Messiah is David's divine Lord, how can the Lord be David's physical son?

To have descended from David's family tree means that the Messiah must be a human being; but to be invited to sit at God's right hand, that means that the Messiah must be divine.

So, here's the answer: the Messiah is both man and God; He is both the son of David and the Son of God.

Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Courageous (Victor Books, 1989), p. 91

And with that, the Sadducees are looking for the fire escape: "We have to get out of here!"

Jesus knew that they had to admit at that moment, because at that moment, the light bulb had turned on for them all:

- That they knew He was a descendant of David; they had already checked out His genealogy.
- That they knew that He had claimed to have come from the Father in heaven.
- That they knew He knew how the angels were living and serving in heaven.
- That they knew that Psalm 110 clearly declares that the Messiah both descended from David and yet was eternally the divine Lord.
- And that they knew that Jesus was saying He fulfilled Psalm 110!

That would make Jesus, as Messiah, both man and God.

They knew it! And instead of breaking into praise and worship, they were silent.

They had not shown up here to *thank Him*, but to *trap Him*. But Jesus turned the tables on them, and with divine truth, *He* chased *them* down.

What will they do with Jesus now?

I shared with our student body at Convocation for Shepherds Seminary this past year the conversion account of Adoniram Judson, the great missionary to Burma—now called Myanmar, bordered by India and China.

Adoniram was from a believing home, but when he went to college he came under the influence of a popular, brilliant, student by the name of Jacob Eames.

Jacob became one of Adoniram's closest friends and he introduced Adoniram to what was then called free-thinking; it was atheism that appeared as skepticism; it denied the resurrection, the deity of Christ and the need for salvation.

By the time Adoniram graduated, he had abandoned the Bible he'd learned to read at the age of three; he abandoned the gospel of his parent's faith.

After informing his parents of his unbelief and trying his hand at tutoring for a year, he set out to tour New England on horseback.

He eventually joined a group of actors in New York City and began living a rather reckless, sinful life. They would often find lodging in an inn, run up the bill and then slip out in the night without paying.

Adoniram eventually grew tired of this wandering lifestyle and struck out on his own, roaming without purpose and without meaning.

One night, he stopped to spend the night at an inn he'd never stayed at before. The innkeeper warned him that his sleep might be interrupted by a young man next door to Judson's room who was dying.

Sure enough, during the night, the moaning and crying of this young man in the next room kept him awake. The man seemed to be on the brink of dying; his agony and his crying in hopelessness kept Adoniram lying wide-awake for hours.

As he lay there, he wondered about the young man's soul, where would he spend eternity, what was his hope after death; he began thinking the same thoughts about his own soul and his own eternal destiny.

Eventually the moaning stopped, and Adoniram drifted off to sleep. Early the next morning, Adoniram asked about him and the innkeeper confirmed that the young man had died that night.

Adoniram asked him, “Do you know who he was?” And the innkeeper said, “Oh yes, his name was Jacob Eames.”

Adoniram could barely move. In fact, he stayed at the inn for hours pondering the death of his friend.

He would recount later to a friend, “That hell should open up in this country inn and snatch my dearest friend from the next room—this could not be pure coincidence.”

It was clear to Adoniram Judson that God was on his trail. He immediately returned home and to the joy of his parents, he trusted Christ for his personal salvation and devoted his life to the Lord.

Adapted from: Jesse Clement, The Life of Rev. Adoniram Judson & John Piper, Adoniram Judson: How Few There Are Who Die So Hard

The Sadducees were first century skeptics who did not believe in life after death, until it was too late. Their followers exist today by the millions.

The bigger question is this: are you one of them?

Do you have your favorite philosophical question down pat to ward off Christians getting too close?

Do you have your favorite riddle about the universe that no one can seem to answer?

Here’s what you can know, listen to the words of Jesus:

- There is life after death.
- There are angels.
- There is a future heaven for the redeemed.
- There is an afterlife in eternal glory for those who claim Him as Savior.

Claim Him as your Savior today!

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