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GOD NOT OF THE DEAD, BUT OF THE LIVING

Luke 20:27-40; Proper 27C-Pentecost 22C; November 8-9, 2025

When Christians die, their bodies are buried and their souls go to heaven. Scripture clearly teaches this, though God has not revealed everything we want to know about it, and it is a little mysterious. This results in church members asking pastors all sorts of questions about heaven: how it will compare to life on earth; what we will know; who we will know; what will our relationships with family and loved ones be like, especially our spouse; if someone has been married more than once, which one will be the spouse.

When I am asked about marriage on earth and how that might change in heaven, I turn to Luke 20, our Gospel Reading for today. In it we hear Jesus asked a direct question about people who were married on earth and how that works out in heaven. Jesus answered some of the questions we have, but not to the extent that we might want, and not how some married folks think it will be.

As we explore the Gospel Reading today, marriage and what happens after Christian spouses die and go to heaven won't be ignored, but we need to focus on what Jesus considers most important. The main topic in our Gospel Reading is not actually marriage, but Jesus' teaching on the resurrection of the dead.

Luke emphasized this by how he began. **There came to [Jesus] some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, and they asked Him a question.** And Jesus' concluding comments reinforce that His teaching focuses especially on the resurrection. **“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.”**

Jesus' teaching here is focused on the living God who raises the dead. He did this in the context of the question about whose wife a woman would be under the Law of Moses. Seven brothers tried to produce a son who would be considered the heir of the first, but they all died and then the woman died without any children.

The Sadducees asked Jesus: **“In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be?”** His answer: **“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.”**

What God’s Word teaches about marriage is that it was created for **“this age”** and not for **“that age”** to come in heaven. Marriage is a physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman, a husband and a wife. When we Christians die, our souls go to heaven without our bodies (without faith, souls go to hell). Our souls wait there for the resurrection of our bodies on the last day. Jesus says that Christians raised 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.”**

How did Jesus answer the question about whose wife the woman would be? Jesus basically says, “None of them will be her husband.” Every time we hear at a Christian wedding the groom and bride commit to marrying each other and speak their vows, we are reminded of this. Marriage lasts “so long as you both shall live... till death us do part.” Marriage is for this age and lasts until one of the spouses dies and death parts them; marriage is not a part of the age to come.

In the age of “the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come,” as we confess in the Nicene Creed, Jesus says that we will be like angels. Angels do not get married. More importantly, Jesus notes that angels cannot die, and those raised from the dead **cannot die anymore and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.**

That the Sadducees asked Jesus, **“In the resurrection... whose wife will the woman be?”** was disingenuous. The Sadducees **denied that there is a resurrection.** They did not believe that God will raise our dead bodies to life on the last day. Sadducees also did not believe there are spiritual beings called angels. Sadducees did not believe that the books of the Old Testament beyond the five books of Moses, Genesis—Deuteronomy, were the Word of God.

Their question about the resurrection was based on God's Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy (25:6), which they considered authoritative, the law about producing a son as an heir. Jesus' answer that God raises the dead was based on a verse from Exodus three, also Moses. The Sadducees should not have denied the resurrection of the dead. Jesus quoted what we heard earlier in our Old Testament Reading: **“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.”**

Many people today reject much of the Bible as being God's Word or deny the Bible is true or has any authority over them. Christians can become infected by false beliefs floating around in the culture, like we become angels when we die, or cardinals bring us spiritual comfort from loved ones who have died. Some falsely believe that we get to throw off this physical body when we die and will have only a higher spiritual existence in an afterlife. Some people deny that there is any life after death; when our bodies die there is no soul that goes on living – in heaven or hell – and that we cease to exist, except in the memories of loved ones, they say.

These beliefs, and others like them, are anti-Christian and false. They deny that God created us in body and soul and will raise our bodies from the dead. They deny that God's Son needed to come in human flesh, body and soul, to save us in body and soul.

Why did God's Old Testament Law commanded Israelites that when a husband died without an heir his brother was to serve as the husband of his widow and produce a son with her, who would be considered the dead brother's son? Christians are not required to keep this law. Why not? Because it has been fulfilled in Christ.

Deuteronomy 25:6 is the key verse: **And the first son whom she bears** [conceived by her dead husband's brother] **shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel** (Dt 25:6). The Greek version of the Old Testament (LXX) has “seed” for “son,” commonly translated as “offspring” in our Bibles. This points us toward God's promise in Genesis three that the Seed, Offspring (baby Boy) of the woman would crush the serpent's

(devil's) head at the price of the Son's heel being bruised (3:15). Jesus is that "Seed/Offspring/Son" who was born virgin Mary, a descendant of King David. God gave this law about ensuring an heir of a dead husband to perpetuate his line so that God's Son would be born of woman.

The Old Testament book Ruth gives details of how God fulfilled His promise under His Law. Naomi's son, Chilion, married Ruth, a Moabitess, but died without producing an heir. When Ruth returned with Naomi to Bethlehem, none of the relatives of the dead Chilion were willing to marry her, redeem and perpetuate the family line, except Boaz. Boaz married Ruth, who gave birth to Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of King David, whose Descendant is Jesus, the Son of David, the Christ, our Savior.

St. Paul wrote of this in Galatians four: **But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons** (4:4-5). Jesus died on the cross to redeem us from breaking the law. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day to raise us from the dead to live forever as God's sons.

The events of today's Gospel took place a few days before Jesus' death and resurrection. The ones who questioned Him about whose wife the woman would be when raised didn't actually believe that there was such a thing as the resurrection of the body. They were some of the ones who would have Jesus arrested and put to death for claiming that He was not only God's Son, but God Himself when Jesus said of Himself, **"Before Abraham was, I AM"** (Jn 8:59).

Jesus is the I AM God who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush. The living God said to Moses, **"Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."** Our God is alive, not dead, and we are alive to Him in Christ Jesus. In faith, we "look for the resurrection of the dead and the ✠ life of the world to come" (Nicene Creed). Amen.