

The God of the Living

Luke 20:27-44

In 1993 professional golfer Paul Azinger was diagnosed with cancer. He was 33. He had just won a PGA championship and he had ten tournament victories to his credit.

After receiving the diagnosis here's what he wrote; "A genuine feeling of fear came over me. I could die from cancer. Then another reality hit me even harder. I'm going to die eventually anyway, whether from cancer or something else. It's just a question of when. Everything I had accomplished in golf became meaningless to me. All I wanted to do was live."

Then he remembered something that Larry Moody, who taught a Bible study on the tour, had said to him. **"Zinger, we're not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. We're in the land of the dying trying to get to the land of the living."**

Paul Azinger recovered from his cancer, and the chemotherapy treatments, and he returned to the PGA tour. He's done pretty well and today is a golf analyst for Fox Sports.

But that bout with cancer deepened his perspective. He wrote, "I've made a lot of money since I've been on the tour, and I've won a lot of tournaments, but that happiness is always temporary. The only way you will ever have true contentment is in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I'm not saying that nothing ever bothers me and I don't have problems, but I feel like I've found the answer to the six-foot hole."

I was struck by the simplicity and the reality of Larry Moody's words. As followers of Jesus "...we're not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. We're in the land of the dying trying to get to the land of the living." It's so easy to forget that simple truth in the daily hustle and bustle of living.

And you know, many people today deny the reality of the resurrection. Their idea is that "when you die, you die like a dog. They put you in the ground and that's the end of it." They have a purely materialist world-view. No wonder their lives have no meaning, no purpose. If this is all there is, what's the point?

[The Answer to Death, Citation: Robert Russell, "Resurrection Promises," Preaching Today, Tape No. 151.]

There were people with this world-view who lived during the time of Jesus too. Does that surprise you? Did you think a materialist world-view was something new? Hardly! The major questions of life have intrigued people ever since time began. “Why am I here; where did I come from; where am I going; what happens after I die?” These questions and others are asked by people the world over in every generation.

In our study of Luke’s Gospel we’ve come to chapter 20 and verses 27 to 44. Jesus had just silenced the Pharisees on the question of authority. When the Sadducees saw what happened they were gleeful; yet decided to try to trap Jesus with their own question about the resurrection.

So let’s see what happened. I’ve titled our study “The God of the Living” and I’m reading Luke 20:27 to 44 from the NKJV. Here now are the words of God to us.

This text records the TESTIMONY of three witnesses who verify the reality of the resurrection.

The First TESTIMONY is,

The Testimony of Jesus

As I said just before reading our text, the Sadducees wanted to trap Jesus with their question about the resurrection. Who were the Sadducees and what might have motivated them?

The majority of the Sadducees were wealthy, aristocratic, and elitist. They denied the supernatural, including the resurrection; they were the rationalists/materialists of their day. This put them in direct opposition to the Pharisees. They also rejected the Pharisees oral interpretations of the Law and didn’t accept them as binding. The Sadducees held to Scripture as the sole authority - but they believed it should be modified by logic. In other words, they wanted the freedom to interpret Scripture the way they wanted to. Does that sound familiar?

Many of the Sadducees served as priests in the Temple. Josephus, the Jewish-Roman historian, mentions one high priest, Ananus, who had five sons. Each of the five eventually served as high priest. The Sadducees primarily focused on Israel’s position in the physical world, and not in its future position in the spiritual world.

So these men came to Jesus with a hypothetical question based on Deuteronomy 25:5 to 10. Our text gives us the basic idea of this law of levirate marriage. So they came up with this almost impossible situation about one woman sequentially being the wife of seven brothers and

having no children. I think if I'd have been about the third or fourth brother I'd of said, "Count me out; I'm not ready to die yet." You can almost picture them sneeringly asking Jesus; "Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?"

In our text, Jesus immediately responds with an explanation. But in Matthew's record of this same event He prefaces His teaching like this; "*You are in error, not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God.*" Wow; that was a zinger! Here was Jesus, who according to John 7:15 was a man whom the religious leaders knew had never studied under the famous rabbis, and he was telling them they didn't know the Scriptures? What gall! These were learned men, well-versed in the Scripture but either they didn't know what it meant or they didn't believe it. Unfortunately, there are many like them today in the pulpits of our churches and the chairs of our seminaries.

Now Jesus begins to explain their error. Marriage is for this world, Jesus said. Marriage and procreation will not be needed in heaven. Why? Well for one thing, death will be DEFEATED! Jesus said those who are accounted worthy to reach heavenly existence cannot die anymore. Please note that condition; those who are counted worthy. Because they have been resurrected they become immortal, like the angels.

They are now fully the sons of God because they are the sons of the resurrection. Listen to Paul's words in Romans 8:21 to 23. "*...because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.*"

Paul states further, in First Corinthians 15:42 and following; "*So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*"

There's another reason why marriage isn't needed in heaven. Marriage was created as a type of Christ's relationship with the church. When we get to heaven the marriage between Christ and His bride, the church, will be consummated; so the type, earthly marriage, will no longer be needed. My wife and I have a wonderful marriage. But the quality and purity of relationships in eternity will go far beyond what we experience now. With sin banished, no

longer to cloud our relationships, our personal relationships will be directed by the fullness of the presence of God. I can't imagine what that will be like; can you?

The authoritative testimony of Jesus provides clear proof of the reality of the resurrection.

The Second TESTIMONY is,

The Testimony of Moses

Jesus was the master Teacher. Did you notice that the Sadducees appealed to Moses' law? They saw the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, as carrying supreme authority. They took the command God gave through Moses, the command of levirate marriage, and extrapolated it to an absurd, hypothetical situation. They knew Moses' law; they'd studied it forward and backward. They were sure they had Jesus caught in their trap.

But now Jesus appeals to the same prophet, Moses. He points them back to Moses' experience at the burning bush. The proof that God raises the dead is evident in Moses' record of the words of God in Exodus 3:6. There, Moses records God speaking these words of identification; *"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob..."* From man's perspective, all of these were dead.

But look at what Jesus says in verse 38 of our text. *"[God] is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: for all live to Him."* So if God is the God of the living, then the patriarchs must be alive or present somehow in the midst of God. Jamieson, Fausett, and Brown in their commentary state the following:

To God, no human being is dead, or ever will be; but all sustain an abiding conscious relation to Him. But the "all" here meant "those who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world." These *sustain a gracious covenant relation to God, which cannot be dissolved*. In this sense our Lord affirms that for Moses to call the Lord the "God" of His patriarchal servants if at that moment they had no existence, would be unworthy of Him. He "would be *ashamed* to be called their God, if He had not prepared for them a city" (Heb 11:16). How precious are these glimpses of the *resurrection state!*¹ End quote.

¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 121). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

In the account of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16, verse 22 pictures Lazarus being carried to Abraham's side in Hades, the place of departed spirits. What value would be in this picture if Abraham did not exist? But Abraham comforts Lazarus and also communicates with the rich man.

After hearing the words of Jesus, one of the audience responded; "Master, you have spoken well." And then both parties, Pharisees and Sadducees were silenced. Surely, Jesus, using the words of God through Moses communicates the reality of the resurrection.

The Final TESTIMONY is,

The Testimony of David

Now, it's Jesus' turn to ask the questions of these men who were supposedly so knowledgeable of the Scriptures. He knew that a favorite identification of the Messiah among the Jews of the day was "The Son of David." Just a few days before the events of our text they had lauded Jesus by that name. While this identification was true, it was incomplete; it dealt only with His humanity. Jesus wanted His listeners to understand His deity; His connection with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Notice Jesus' questions in these last verses of our text end without Him giving an answer. These questions were asked to stimulate thinking and reflection. However, there is an implied answer we want to examine.

David is the speaker in Psalm 110, which Jesus quotes, and if he addresses the messianic figure as his "Lord," then how can the title Son of David be the best one for the Messiah? In other words, how can David show such reverence to this "lord" if he is his son, rather than his ancestor? The full identity of Jesus becomes the central issue that will culminate in the Cross.

In verse 42 Jesus gives the picture of the Son of David sitting at the right hand of the throne of Jehovah God. That position reveals He is both Lord and Christ. I admit this is much clearer today because the resurrection of Jesus is historical for us. However, if David showed such reverence toward this promised king, shouldn't the Jewish leaders do the same? The conclusion was obvious; but it was unacceptable to them.

Now those in Jesus audience are faced with a choice. The reality of the resurrection has been proven by the testimony of Jesus, the testimony of Moses, and the testimony of David. How

will they answer this question? Will they continue to walk in spiritual darkness, in the deadness of their own religion? Or will they embrace the Messiah as the God of the Living and be counted worthy to attain to the resurrection of the righteous? You and I are faced with this same choice. I pray you will choose Jesus today and enter into a relationship with “The God of the Living.”