

• *The Sadducees try to make Jesus look foolish*

There were different groups of religious leaders in Israel. When Jesus was teaching in the courts of the temple during the last week of His life, all of the different kinds of Jewish leader were trying to get Jesus into trouble. Now the Sadducees try to make Jesus look foolish. They ask a question about the resurrection of the dead.

1. *Resurrection is the greatest challenge to faith*

1. **Resurrection is the greatest challenge to faith.** Here are **religious** people who are in power in the land of Israel. The Sadducees were the denomination that had the greatest political power. Caiaphas was a Sadducee. They were worldly sceptical people, who despite their claim to be believers in the God of Israel had little faith in the supernatural. There are two different kinds of unbelieving religious people. Some are great lovers of church life but have no relationship with God – the Pharisees were mainly like that. Others are more interested in politics, morality and government affairs – this is what the Sadducees were like. Neither the Pharisees nor the Sadducees knew much about a personal relationship with God.

• *Sadducees more interested in politics than a relationship with God*

One of the greatest tests of true salvation is what you believe happens to you after you die. Do you believe in the resurrection of the body? It is quite a difficult thing to believe. Think about it! One day your body will have ceased to function and will begin to decompose. In one way or another God will raise your body. It is a great mystery but you will have a new body, and there will be some kind of connection between your new body and your old body. Quite how it all works I do not know, but your new body will resemble your old body in some way, and you will be recognisable. Do you believe in the resurrection of the dead? You either do or you don't. Which is it?

• *The resurrection of the body is quite a difficult thing to believe*

• *A hypothetical question designed to make the resurrection look silly*

The Sadducees tried to ridicule the idea of resurrection by telling a hypothetical story^{☞1}. It is a rather silly story about seven brothers who all married the same woman one after the other, because each of the brothers died one at a time. It is based upon the 'Levirate marriage' in ancient Israel (in which if the husband died the widow was taken as wife by his brother). The question 'Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?' was designed to make the resurrection look silly.

☞1 20:27-33

2. *The hope of resurrection is based on the faithfulness of God*

2. **The hope of the resurrection is based on the faithfulness of God.** Jesus tells them bluntly they are wrong. They have an altogether wrong view of the after-life. There is no marriage in it^{☞1}, and there is no death in it^{☞2}.

☞1 20:35

☞2 20:36

• *Rebuked for their wrong view of the afterlife*

He also rebukes them for their scepticism about the resurrection. The certainty of resurrection depends on God's faithfulness to His people. God has said that He is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. If the Sadducees were right Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were annihilated at the time of their death. But God speaks of Himself as still being in relationship with them.

• *Rebuked for their scepticism*

• *God's relationship with His people continues after death*

It is very bold and daring to believe in resurrection. The Sadducees were governed by their scepticism but Jesus has a higher and greater view. The hope of life after death is rooted in God's faithfulness. God is faithful, and His relationship to His people continues after death. It is

His faithfulness that guarantees He will reverse the processes of death and restore His people to life – and for Jesus this means life in a new body.

- *If God is to be faithful to Abraham and truly fulfil his promises he will have to be raised from the dead*

3. Resurrection is connected with reward

- *Resurrection is the occasion when people reap the results of what they have done in this life*
- *There is a resurrection to condemnation*
- *Whereas in the heavenly kingdom the righteous enjoy their heavenly rewards for ever and ever*

Many of the promises given to Abraham – for example that he would enjoy earthly territory and international fame – were never fulfilled in his lifetime. If God is to be faithful to Abraham and truly fulfil His promises to him, Abraham – and Isaac and Jacob – will have to be raised from the dead. Anyone with a real grasp of God’s promises to Abraham and faith in His power will be able to see it that way. Abraham will have to be ‘living’ in a resurrection body for God to be completely faithful to him.

3. Resurrection is connected with reward. We notice that Jesus speaks of those who are ‘*considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead*¹’. This is a reminder to the Pharisees that resurrection is the occasion when people reap the results of what they have done in this life. The Sadducees want to put some awkward facts about resurrection. Well, Levirate marriage raises no problems, but the fact of judgement at the day of resurrection will raise far more difficult problems for these sceptical Sadducees. There is a resurrection to condemnation; some will be thrown into the lake of fire to be destroyed. Others will be ‘worthy of the age of the resurrection which lasts for ever and ever’. Of course Jesus is not saying we come to the **first** phase of salvation by being ‘worthy’. Good works will never be a way of justification. But good works are on the agenda for judgement day. The Sadducees expect to be annihilated at death, but Jesus warns them. They will survive long enough to face judgement and punishment. They will survive long enough to face exclusion from ‘that age’ – the heavenly kingdom where the righteous enjoy their heavenly rewards for ever and ever. They will survive long enough to repay every piece of wickedness they have ever committed. They like to think about awkward facts in connection with resurrection. Let them think about those awkward facts. There are no further questions for Jesus to answer after that².

¹ 20:35

² 20:39-40

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