

SERMON TEXT, Luke 20:27-38

November 14, 2004

THEME: "Our God is a God of the Living"

SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

SAINTS TRIUMPHANT

²⁷Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question.

²⁸"Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. ²⁹Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. ³⁰The second ³¹and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. ³²Finally, the woman died too. ³³Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" ³⁴Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. ³⁷But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' ³⁸He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."

LET US PRAY:

(From CW #559)

Be with us, God the Father; Be with us, God the Son
And God the Holy Spirit, Most blessed Three in One.
Make us your faithful servants You rightly to adore,
And fill us with your blessing Both now and evermore.
Amen.

Dear fellow saints awaiting the glorious family reunion in God's perfect heaven,

At many times we have learned to be skeptical of words and reports.

- If it's too good to be true, it probably is.
- If the news reports have not told the whole story but only the slant and spin that they want, then how do I know if I can trust their reporting in the future.

But we are influenced by many forms of input and opinion to even become skeptical of God's Word. Sad but true many dismiss the central truths of the Bible.

- For them it may be too good to be true.
- For some the Bible must be explainable and needs to make human sense.
- Ultimately, those same people wish to rationalize everything that they hear, and see convincing proof before they will simply take God at his word.

Our text today, introduces us to the Jewish group known as the Sadducees. They were the skeptics of Jesus' day. They were an opposition group to the Pharisees. The Sadducees were mainly prevalent in the vicinity of Jerusalem. And this is precisely where we find Jesus on this day in our text. It is the Tuesday of Holy Week, just two days after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The Sadducees were seeking to confront Jesus and to trap him with a highly improbable question. In the end, they wanted to know which brother of seven would be married to a certain woman when they are all united in heaven. But in truth they were diverting the real issue. They were masking their own false belief. They only wanted to dampen Jesus' credibility and to ruin his reputation as a teacher. For their real problem was their own denial of the resurrection. They thought after living this life all is lost, and then the body and soul of any individual would cease to exist.

Jesus cleverly jumps directly to the nub of the issue. He states clearly that our God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Indeed Jesus is true God. He is our Savior God.

1. This means he is bigger than life.
2. This means he will grant us eternal life.

1.

To appreciate the fact that Jesus is bigger than life, we must also remember that this life on this earth is fragile and weak. For every human being is mortal. We are vulnerable and susceptible to death. Recently, I did a search on GOOGLE to find out the actual rate of death. Yes, many of us have already heard the statistic that the rate of death has never changed. It is always one death per person. But there is a worldwide rate of mortality. On one particular website, I found a counter on their home page. It tallies how many people on the earth have died during the time that elapsed since you got onto their website. The rate is figured by factoring in all the deaths in this world in relation to its population. On that basis, 1.78 people die in this world every second. Or on average in this calendar year, 1 out of every 113 people will die.

Consider the picture of the largest domino fall, which set a new world record. This weekend, a cable news channel showed video of thousands upon thousands of dominos falling in a chain reaction. It took weeks to set up, but only minutes to fall down. In a similar way, people are like dominos falling to death. At some point, our time to fall will certainly come.

Death is no respecter of age. It does not care how old we are. It does not care how much money we make. It does not care what race we are or whether we are men or women. Death does not care what our social status is or whether or not we have some fame or fortune. Clearly, the wages of sin is death. This reality of death is horrifying and uncomfortable. God alone is the author and finisher of life. But pondering this fact leads us to hold in high regard Jesus' words of the Resurrection. This is precisely why our text is comforting and uplifting. Jesus reassures us today, that he is a God of the living.

Consider the lack of comfort there is, offered by the Sadducees in our text and also among the skeptics of our day. If there is not a resurrection or hope of eternal life, people will undoubtedly be led to one of two conclusions in life. 1. They will despair and fret over their eventual death. 2. They may take on the philosophy of life that the Epicureans promoted. This was "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die". Such a concept of life leads to the self-serving lifestyle of living for momentary pleasure.

The pleasure and happiness Jesus gives us is by no means momentary, but everlasting. On the basis of that fact alone, we see and believe that Jesus is truly bigger than life. He is our everlasting Savior and Redeemer. While some laws of the Old Testament did change (such as the one noted in our text regarding a widow needing to marry her husband's brother), God's message of the resurrection has never changed. In the Old Testament, Job confessed to this truth in Job chapter 19, ²⁵ "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth." ²⁶ And after my skin has been

destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; ²⁷ I myself will see him with my own eyes-I, and not another.” And Job was considered to be a contemporary of Abraham, living around 2000 years before the birth of Jesus. King David also professed this comforting truth in Psalm 16, “⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, ¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”

In John’s Gospel, Jesus further reinforces this comfort of the resurrection by attesting to his divine attributes of being everlasting and never changing. In John chapter 8, Jesus told many Jews who questioned his divine authority and power, “⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.’ ⁵⁷ You are not yet fifty years old,’ the Jews said to him, ‘and you have seen Abraham!’ ⁵⁸ I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’” Jesus was truly there and alive as eternal God at the time of Abraham.

This almighty and authoritative Lord was now standing before the Sadducees. But they wanted nothing to do with him. Like the Pharisees, they thought that the best a person could ever do or even live for was to do good deeds within the short life you have. Living a good life was the best a person could do to earn God’s favor. They were too proud to see their need for a Savior, who could deliver them from their ignorance and most of all from their sin. It was beneath them to swallow all pride and say, “I am a sinner worthy of God’s condemnation, damnation and punishment.” Trusting in Jesus needs to be the central core of what we are about. For Jesus truly is bigger than life. By his perfect life, his innocent death and his triumphant resurrection, we are forever delivered and saved from the hell we deserve. This message is not a mere philosophy or theory; it is history and recorded fact. This gospel message is objective truth.

2.

Now the closing words of our text establish the strong application that our Savior God is a God of the living. Therefore, he is fully able and capable of granting us eternal life in heaven. Note Jesus’ reference to Moses before the burning bush. As the Lord God spoke to Moses from that bush, he did not say, “I was the God of Abraham, or used to be the God of Isaac, or for a time I was Jacob’s God”, as if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ceased to exist. Instead, the souls of these men remained alive and were with the Lord in heaven. Our text emphasizes this, as Jesus said to the Sadducees that in Moses’ record of Exodus chapter 3, “He calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’”

Indeed, further evidence of this truth was made known to three of Jesus’ disciples on that Mount of Transfiguration. There they were personal witnesses of Jesus as he discussed his earthly mission with Moses and Elijah, who had long before left this earth.

All of this is for our real comfort. It seals for us the fact that our God is a God of the living. As true God, Jesus is bigger than life and will also give to us eternal life.

Recall and remember the strong statements of Paul to the Corinthian church, which reinforce this absolute truth of Jesus' victory over death for you and for me. In the Great Resurrection Chapter of 1 Corinthians chapter 15, we are told, ⁵⁴"Death has been swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." This is further attested to in the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. For we worship a living Savior, not a dead Savior. Because he lives we too will live. This truth carries with it eternal ramifications and consequences. They are everlasting blessings for sure.

John used such a message to keep the early Christians ever focused upon their ultimate destination, and not upon their present trials and misfortunes. In Revelation 21, he writes of the heaven that awaits us, ³"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." In short, when we are in heaven, . . .

- There will be funerals.
- There will be no hospital stays.
- There will be no surgeries.
- There will be no need for medications.
- There will be no poverty.
- There will be no Kleenex's.
- There will be no despair or sorrow of any kind.

In closing, how is this message of the resurrection relevant for our day-to-day living?

Consider four clear applications that affect us each and every day:

1. The Resurrection affects how I live my life now. This life is not all there is. I have a purpose and mission to share this fulfilling and comforting message with a dying people.
2. The Resurrection affects how I view my material things now. Since I will never take my money or possession with me after this life, I will want to remember who first blessed me with such gifts. And I will seek to use them in every way to his glory.
3. The Resurrection affects how I look at my relationships with people on this earth. Life is too short to hold a lasting grudge against another. If they are a fellow believer, then I need be glad about that fact and realize I will one day spend an eternity with them in heaven. If they are an unbeliever, then I need to be concerned for their eternal well being. There is not a single person, not even my worst enemy that I would wish to suffer an eternity in hell.
4. The Resurrection affects how I tolerate the unpleasant things of this life. Any form of suffering in this life is temporary, far superseded by God's promise of eternal happiness in heaven. Saint Paul sums up this truth in Romans chapter, ¹⁸"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Remember this rich meaning of Jesus' victory over death. His victory is our victory. Our God is a God of the living. This means that Jesus, true God, is really bigger than life. And at his choosing, he will grant us eternal life with himself in heaven. Amen.