

REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 75: "THE CERTAINTY OF THE RESURRECTION"

LUKE 20:27-40

Ps. Eric Yee

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone, and happy new year! If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 75 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're going through the Gospel of Luke together.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "The Certainty of the Resurrection."

Introduction

How do you feel about starting another new year? Perhaps there are some regrets from this past year. Perhaps there is some excitement for the coming year.

Many people make new year's resolutions, where they want to live differently. A few years ago, there was a popular idea all over social media called "YOLO," and it seemed to resonate with many people as the theme they wanted to live their lives by.

The New Oxford American Dictionary defines "YOLO" as an informal abbreviation for:

YOLO = you only live once (expressing the view that one should make the most of the present moment without worrying about the future, and often used as a rationale for impulsive or reckless behavior).

So for example, someone might say "yolo" before jumping off a cliff into the water, or before spending an excessive amount of money on an extravagant vacation, or before eating a whole cake by themselves.

Or someone might say:

- "I decided to quit my job and travel the world. Yolo!"
- Or "We're going to the concert tonight, even though we have an exam tomorrow. Yolo!"
- Or "I got a tattoo of unicorn on my back. Yolo!"

Now, even if many of us don't use YOLO in our vocabulary, the *attitude* or *mindset* of YOLO is probably more present in us than we realize.

YOLO implies that life is short and unpredictable, so one should make the most of it and enjoy every moment. YOLO implies that this life is all there is.

But is that *really* true?

If our faith is in the resurrected Christ, then we *don't* believe that this life is all there is. Rather, there is a resurrection age to come when Christ returns, where we ourselves will be resurrected to enjoy a renewed, embodied, immortal life in the new heavens and new earth.

So, for the Christian, YOLO doesn't make any sense. We don't need to squeeze everything out of this temporary life now, but we have all eternity in the resurrection age to come to enjoy all this world has to offer.

The One Thing

Let's live by faith in the resurrection age to come.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 20:27-40.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

This is Jesus' final week before his crucifixion.

He has made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-44), he has entered the temple and overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold animals (Luke 19:45-46; cf. Mark 11:15-16), and the religious leaders are now trying to find a way to kill him (Luke 19:47).

So as Jesus is teaching people in the temple,

- the religious leaders question his authority, but Jesus exposes their misuse of authority (Luke 20:1-18);
- they try to trap Jesus in a question about whether it's lawful or not to pay taxes to Caesar, but Jesus leaves them marveling and silent in his response (Luke 20:19-26);
- and now, they will try a *third* time to stump Jesus in a question about the resurrection.

And that's where we are in today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 20:27-40.

²⁷ There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, 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. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. ³⁰ And the second ³¹ and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. ³² Afterward the woman also died. ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife."

³⁴ And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 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.

³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.” ³⁹ Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” ⁴⁰ For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

This is God’s Word.

Overview

We’ll look at this passage in two parts:

- I. The Sadducees denied and ridiculed the resurrection (vv. 27-33)
- II. Jesus clarified and defended the resurrection (vv. 34-40)

I. The Sadducees denied and ridiculed the resurrection (vv. 27-30)

Look at verse 27.

[²⁷ There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection,]

Here, we’re introduced to a group of religious leaders known as the “Sadducees,” and we’re told that they “deny that there is a resurrection.”

So who exactly were the Sadducees?

In the first century, there were two main religious parties in Jewish public life—the *Pharisees* and the *Sadducees*.

The *Pharisees* had much influence among the people, but the *Sadducees* controlled the temple and the Sanhedrin, which was the highest Jewish court of justice in Jerusalem.¹

And since they controlled the temple, the Sadducees became wealthy members of the upper class through the business of exchanging money and selling animals in the temple.²

So you can imagine how upset they were with Jesus, who disrupted their whole way of life when he entered the temple and overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold animals (Luke 19:45-46; cf. Mark 11:15-16).

Although the Pharisees and Sadducees can be collectively called the Jewish “religious leaders” of the time, there were a couple key *differences* between them.

First, the Pharisees adopted not only Scripture as authoritative but also the traditions of their forefathers, which included many regulations that went *beyond* what Scripture taught. But the Sadducees adopted *only* Scripture as authoritative, giving special weight to the first five books of Moses (that is, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

Second, the Pharisees believed in life after death and a resurrection of the dead on the last day, but the Sadducees did *not* believe in life after death and they *denied* the resurrection (Acts 4:1-2; 23:8), presumably

¹ “Jewish Groups at the Time of the New Testament,” in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

² R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

because they did not see it explicitly mentioned in the first five books of Moses. And so, this issue of the *resurrection* became an age-old, perpetual debate between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.³

Now look at verse 28.

[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.]

Here, the Sadducees refer to laws found in Deuteronomy 25 regarding what's known as “levirate marriage” (Deut. 25:5-10). They state that, if a *married* man died without a son, the man's *unmarried* brother had the duty to marry the widow, where the dead brother would be considered the *legal* father of the *first* son produced from that marriage.

In a society where a widow with no children to care for her would have been reduced to begging, this provided for the widow. This also preserved the name of the deceased, which kept a family from dying out and kept the family wealth intact.⁴

So based on laws regarding levirate marriage, the Sadducees propose a *hypothetical* situation and ask a question to Jesus to show the apparent *absurdity* (or *ridiculousness*) of the resurrection.⁵

Look at verses 29-33.

[²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. ³⁰ And the second ³¹ and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. ³² Afterward the woman also died. ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.”]

In their hypothetical situation, there are seven brothers. The *first* brother marries his wife, but he dies without having any children. So on the basis of levirate marriage, the *second* brother marries the widow, but then he *also* dies without having any children with her. So again, on the basis of levirate marriage, the *third* brother does the same, but he *also* dies without having any children. And on and on until the *seventh* brother does the same, but he *also* dies without having any children. And finally, the woman dies.

So in the resurrection, whose wife will the woman be? She was married to all seven brothers, one at a time, in this life. And *none* of the brothers have any special claim to her because none of them had a child with her.⁶

The Sadducees rightly assume that marriage ought to be *monogamous*, meaning that marriage is exclusively between one man and one woman at a time. Therefore, no pious Jews would have said that she would equally be the wife of all seven brothers in the resurrection.⁷

So the Sadducees believed that this hypothetical situation shows the *absurdity* of the resurrection. In other words, they were *ridiculing* the resurrection: “How could you possibly believe in the resurrection when you end up with such an unsolvable dilemma like this one?”⁸

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009); R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 364; and “Jewish Groups at the Time of the New Testament,” in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁴ NET footnote; and R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

⁵ Leon L. Morris (*Luke*, TNTC [Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2008], 308) writes: “By New Testament times this custom seems to have fallen into disuse, so that the question was an academic one. But the Sadducees could argue that provision was made for it in the Law, and that the Law accordingly, at least by implication, rejects the doctrine of resurrection.”

⁶ Study note on Luke 20:28-31, in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁷ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse By Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018); and *Matthew–Luke*, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009); and NET footnote.

Since this was a common dispute between Sadducees and Pharisees, it's likely that they used this kind of hypothetical situation before with the Pharisees, and *none* of them could come up with a satisfying response. And so, they think that this question would stump *Jesus* as well.⁹

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Now, before we get to Jesus' response, what does this have to do with us?

Like the Sadducees, we *all* have a tendency to deny or diminish biblical doctrines, and we may even use *Scripture* to defend it.

For example, you may not deny the *resurrection*, but do you deny or diminish what God's Word says about *sexual purity*? Perhaps you rationalize that God created us with sexual desires and it would be *wrong* for us to deny those desires.

But are we not called to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus—in order that we might not lose our lives but save them (Matt. 16:24-25)? Did Jesus not say that if your right eye or right hand causes you to sin, you ought to gouge it out or cut it off, and that it's better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go to hell (Matt. 5:27-30)?

Or if not *sexual purity*, do you functionally deny or diminish what God's Word says about *money*? Do we appeal to Proverbs for our excessive *saving*? Do we appeal to the goodness of God's creation to rationalize our excessive *spending* to enjoy what God has created?

But does Jesus not call the man who hoards his wealth and possession a "fool" (Luke 12:13-21)? Does Jesus not call us to use our wealth to make friends for heaven (Luke 16:9)? Does Jesus not tell the parable of the rich man who enjoyed all that life had to offer to the neglect of poor Lazarus, and how he ended up in hell (Luke 16:19-31)? Does Jesus not lament the unwillingness of the rich man to part with his money in order to follow him and enter the kingdom of God (Luke 18:18-30)?

How could we ever make *light* of such *severe* warnings that Jesus gives? How could we ever rationalize these sins as things that Jesus is ok with?

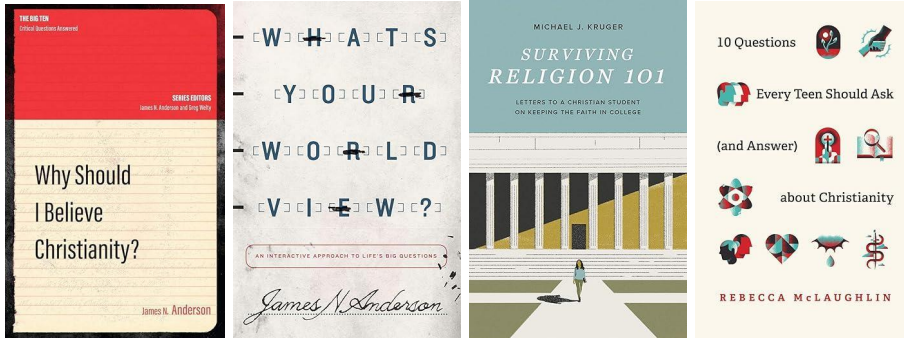
The list is endless in how we are tempted to do this. We are constantly tempted to functionally deny or diminish what God's Word says, even *using* Scripture to justify our way of life rather than allowing the truth of God's Word to *correct* us and *conform* us into the likeness of Christ.

Also, like the Sadducees *ridiculed* the resurrection, many of us will find ourselves in situations where our family members, friends, or the culture around us will *ridicule* what the Bible teaches—whether on gender, marriage, heaven and hell, or even the very existence of God.

If you're a teenager and you're a follower of Christ, you *will* have your faith *ridiculed* at one time or another. And you don't want to be caught by surprise. Rather, you should know that there are good biblical and rational answers to any objection against Christianity that you encounter.

<Show slide with all four books>

⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse By Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).



This goes beyond what we can cover in this sermon, but I'd recommend the following four introductory books to help prepare you for the objections to Christianity that you will soon face (if you haven't already).

- *Why Should I Believe Christianity?* by James Anderson
- *What's Your Worldview?* by James Anderson
- *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College* by Michael Kruger
- *10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask (and Answer) about Christianity* by Rebecca McLaughlin

If you're a parent of a teenage kids, I'd encourage you to pick up one of these books to read and discuss with your teens sometime this year.

So first, the Sadducees denied and ridiculed the resurrection; and second...

II. Jesus clarified and defended the resurrection (vv. 34-40)

Look at verses 34-36.

[³⁴ And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage,³⁵ 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,³⁶ for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.]

Here, Jesus clarifies a *misunderstanding* about the resurrection age to come.

The Sadducees falsely assumed that the resurrection age would just be a *continuation* of the good life of this present age, as if there were no discontinuities or differences between them.¹⁰

But Jesus *clarifies* that that is not the case. The resurrection age to come will be *different* than the present age.

When Christ returns, there will be a resurrection of the dead, where a final judgment and solemn separation will take place, where the righteous will be resurrected to enjoy endless joy in heaven, and the wicked will be resurrected to endure endless punishment in hell.¹¹

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); and *Matthew–Luke*, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

¹¹ In our Statement of Faith, in the last article titled "The World to Come," it says this: "We believe the end of the world is approaching. At the Last Day, Christ will descend from heaven and raise the dead from the grave to final retribution. A solemn separation will then take place, in which the wicked will be justly assigned to endless punishment and the righteous to endless joy. This judgment will determine forever on principles of righteousness the final state of people in heaven or hell."

Now, when Jesus speaks of the resurrection age to come here, he is referring specifically to the resurrection of the *righteous* unto heaven—not the resurrection of the wicked unto hell.

In other words, the resurrection age to come that Jesus is talking about is synonymous with *heaven*, where “those who are considered worthy” (as verse 35 says) will be resurrected to enjoy a renewed, embodied, immortal life in the new heavens and new earth.

<pause>

Now *who* are “those who are considered worthy” of heaven?

Scripture is clear that *none* of us are righteous—none of us are worthy of heaven—for we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:10, 23).

This is the whole reason for the gospel—or good news—of Jesus Christ. *None* of us are worthy for heaven; we *all* rightfully deserve hell for our sins against a holy God. But in love, God came in the person of Jesus Christ to be our substitute, so that for all who repent of their sins and believe in him as Lord and Savior, Christ took the penalty of *our* sin on the cross and he credited *his* perfect righteousness to us.

In other words, *we* are not worthy of heaven, but *Christ* is, and by *faith* in him, God now *counts* us worthy in his sight.

And so, if we have trusted in *Christ's* righteousness that is *ours* by *faith*, and *not* in our *own* righteousness (or our own good works), then we *will* “attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:9-10)—that is, we *will* enjoy heaven in the resurrection age to come.

<pause>

Still, that resurrection age to come will *not* be exactly like this present age. And Jesus states *two* ways that it will be *different*: (1) there is no human marriage in heaven, and (2) there is no death anymore in heaven.

In fact, there is no human marriage in heaven *because* (or “for” in verse 36) there is no death anymore in heaven.

Marriage assumes *procreation*, which is necessary in a world filled with *death* (lest we all die off). But in a world *without* death, procreation is *not* necessary for we cannot die anymore.¹²

Instead, in verse 36, it says we will be “equal to” angels. This doesn’t mean that we will *become* angels, as if people become angels in heaven. This also doesn’t mean that there is some *hierarchy* in heaven, as if people gain equal status with angels in heaven. Rather, we will be *similar* to, or “like” (NIV), angels in certain respects.

And we don’t need to speculate *how* we will be similar to angels because Jesus tells us *exactly* what he wants us to focus on here. We will be like angels in that we will not marry (cf. Mark 12:25; Matt. 22:30), and in that we cannot die.¹³

<pause>

¹² Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009); and R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

¹³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009); *Matthew–Luke*, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021); and R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 365–367.

Now, although there is no human marriage in heaven, there *is* one marriage in heaven—between Christ and his bride (Eph. 4:31-32). All human marriages are only the signposts or shadows of the ultimate marriage between Christ and his Church—of which we will *all* collectively take part.

Our marriage with *Christ* is the deepest intimacy and satisfaction that human marriages can only dimly *glimpse*. And once that ultimate marriage arrives, the signposts and shadows are not only *unnecessary*, but they are *not* desired.

When a loved one is away for a while, you treasure their *picture*, but when they finally arrive, you no longer stare at their photograph, but you are enthralled by their *real* presence. The *picture* gives way to the real *person*. The *shadow* gives way to the real *substance*.

Christ the Bridegroom is *all* the glory of heaven. *He* is what makes heaven, *heaven*.

Think about it like *this*.

We *all* want to spend time with people who *know* us well and *love* us still. And in the presence of the One who has died and resurrected to deliver you from the penalty, power, and presence of sin, you can be completely yourself without fear of rejection or judgment. Nobody *knows* you better and nobody *loves* you as deeply than Jesus.

We also long to spend time with *interesting* people. And who could be more interesting than the inventor of music, the creator of laughter, the source of all rationality, the artist of all creation in its vast diversity? We could spend *eternity* with him and never grow bored.¹⁴

And not only that, but what's even more amazing is that *he* wants to spend time with *us* for all eternity. In fact, he came to earth to live, die, resurrect, and ascend into heaven to *ensure* that we would forever be his sanctified bride who would be most satisfied in him.

Still, I know that those who have love their spouse and enjoy their marriages now can feel *saddened* by the news that they won't be married to their believing spouse in heaven.

But it's important to keep in mind that though the *marriage* will end, the *relationship* and *friendship* will not. Even in this life, you can have business partners and tennis partners, but even when you're no longer business or tennis partners, it doesn't mean that your *friendship* ends. The relationship built in the context of one kind of partnership often continues to a *permanent* friendship that *remains* even after the partnership has ended.¹⁵

In heaven, you will *still* enjoy an intimate friendship with your spouse, but without all the effects of sin. Right now, even in the best marriages, we often experience misunderstandings and hurts in the relationship. But in heaven, *without* all barriers caused by sin and living in a sinful world, we will *finally* be able to love one another as we ought.

That's even more meaningful for those who have *difficult* marriages right now. If you and your spouse are both believers, despite all the pain you have endured in your marriage, you will experience a restored relationship with one another in heaven. You will finally be able to love one another *perfectly*—in a way that you have never been able to experience in the difficulties of your marriage in this life.

¹⁴ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2004), 279, Kindle.

¹⁵ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2004), 491, Kindle.

<pause>

Now, if you're single, this is also hugely encouraging. Marriage is *not* the end-all and be-all of life, but it is *temporary* and *secondary* to the *eternal* and *ultimate* marriage of Christ and his Church.

At the end of the day, *both* marriage and singleness point us to *Christ*. Whether you're married or not in this present age, we will all enjoy the eternal, ultimate marriage that we have in Christ in the resurrection age to come.

- And so, if you're married, live in light of that day by loving your spouse that way that Christ has loved you and gave himself up for you (Eph. 4:25-32).
- And if you're single, live in light of that day by knowing that you lack nothing and by using your singleness as a gift from God for his glory (1 Cor. 7:7, 35).

If you want to hear more about what the Bible has to say about singleness, I'd refer you to our two-part sermon series on "Singleness" that we preached in 2020, which you can find on our church website.

<pause>

Let's go back now to verse 36. Notice that it also says that we will be "sons of God, being sons of the resurrection," meaning that there is an element to being a "son of God" (or a child of God) that is *yet* to be experienced only when we are *resurrected*.

In a very real sense, we are *already* "sons of God" through adoption in Christ (Gal. 4:5). But the *full experience* of our sonship comes in our participation in the *resurrection* age to come because it has to do with *inheritance* (Rom. 8:23; Gal. 4:7; cf. 1 Pet. 1:4).

In ancient property law, only *sons* could inherit their father's estate.¹⁶ So "sons of God" here is not just referring to men, but it is referring to men *and* women who share the same *status* as "sons"—as joint heirs of salvation and equal partakers of the *inheritance* of their Father's house (1 Pet. 3:7).

And *what* is our inheritance? Scripture says that we will inherit "the world" (Rom. 4:13). Our inheritance is nothing short of the new heavens and new earth. Therefore, although we are *already* "sons of God" by faith in Christ, the *full experience* of our sonship is inseparably tied to the *resurrection* age to come when we will inherit and enjoy the renewed *world* that God has promised to give us.

Now, up to this point, Jesus hasn't *proven* that there is a resurrection, but he *assumes* it and *clarifies* what it will be like. It's not just a one-to-one *continuation* of life in this present age, but there will be certain *discontinuities* (or *differences*) in the resurrection age to come.

But now, he'll move to *defend* the resurrection from Scripture.

Look at verses 37-38.

[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. ³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.]

¹⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

Jesus could have gone to a number of other Old Testament passages that more explicitly mention the resurrection (e.g., Job 19:25-27; Ps. 16:9-10; 73:24; Isa. 25:8; 26:19; Dan. 12:2-3), but he goes to one of the most well-known passages in the first five books of Moses, which the Sadducees gave special weight to. It's one of those "in your face" passages that the Sadducees and every Jew would have known, and Jesus is showing that the resurrection is *right there* in plain sight.

When God appears to Moses in a burning bush, he said, "I *am* the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod. 3:6). At that time, those patriarchs had been *dead* for centuries, but God does *not* say, "I *was* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," but "I *am* their God," using the *present* tense, meaning that they are still *alive* in a real way.

If they were *not* still alive, then God would be saying that he is the God of non-existent beings, which is absurd; it makes no sense to say that God is the God of the dead.¹⁷ And that's exactly Jesus' point: "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him."

Still, what does it mean for God to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? It means that God entered into a *covenant* with them. He made *promises* to them that he will most certainly fulfill.

Earlier, just one chapter before God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, Scripture says that "God remembered his *covenant* with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Exod. 2:24), and his *covenant* with them is the background behind all his great acts of deliverance for the Israelites.

God kept *many* of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob during their lifetimes, but *none* of them saw the fulfillment of *all* of them.

As one pastor notes, "[N]one of these men had full possession of Canaan when they died—the Promised Land. None of them saw offspring like the stars in the sky or the sand in the desert—the promised children. None of them saw the Christ that God said he would give for the nations through the line of Abraham—the promised Savior."¹⁸

But Scripture says in...

Hebrews 11:10, 13, 16 (NLT) = Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.... All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth.... But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

In other words, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *knew* that the covenant promises that God made to them went *beyond* their earthly lives into eternity. And in the rest of the New Testament, we know that the "city" that they looked forward to and that God has prepared for them is New Jerusalem in the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21:1-2).

So the fulfillment of all God's covenant promises can only be realized in the *resurrection* age to come,

- where they will reach the Promised Land of the new heavens and new earth;

¹⁷ Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2008), 310.

¹⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

- where they will worship the Lord with all their promised children—a great multitude that no one can number from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9);
- and where they will see the promised Savior—the crucified and risen Christ—who is himself all the glory of heaven (Rev. 21:23).

Therefore, if Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *remain* dead, then God is *not* a covenant-keeper. If *death* has the last word in their lives, then God would have *defaulted* on his promises to them. The *only* way for God to be *faithful*—not just to *some* but to *all* of his covenant promises to them—is if he *resurrects* them from the dead.

So by virtue of his faithfulness to his *covenant* with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God will most certainly *resurrect* the dead and *fulfill* all his covenant promises to them and to all his people.¹⁹

[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. ³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.”]

Now I want us to notice that Jesus *hinges* his entire defense for the resurrection on the *present tense* of a verb in Scripture and on the understanding of God being a *covenant*-making and *covenant*-keeping God.

But those are things that perhaps many of us don’t pay much attention to in Scripture.

We read the Bible, but we miss the *details*. But *so much* is in that *present tense* verb! *So much* is in the choice of words, in the logic of a sentence, in the structure of a paragraph, in the context of a passage, in the movement of a narrative, in the imagery of metaphors, in the repetition of themes, and how it all from Genesis to Revelation points to the *one* redemptive story of how God saves sinners through the person and work of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27, 44-47; John 5:39, 46). We miss *so much* when we don’t pay attention to the *details* of God’s Word.

And one of those repeated *themes* in God’s Word that perhaps we haven’t given much thought to is God’s *covenants*. All throughout Scripture, the way that God relates to his people is through *covenants*. He made covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David—and *all* of his covenants find their fulfillment in the *new covenant* that he makes with us as believers in Jesus Christ. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus said that he was establishing the *new covenant* in his blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; cf. Jer. 31:33-34).

So when we say that the Lord is *our* God and we are *his* people, we can only say that *because* he brought us into the *new covenant* by faith in Jesus Christ.

And it’s *because* God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God that we can rest assured that if our faith is in Christ, we *have been* saved, we *are being* saved, and we *will be* saved on the last day.

There is *so much* that is for our joy and assurance and transformation that is *right there* in God’s Word that we often overlook.

¹⁹ William L. Lane (*The Gospel According to Mark* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975], 430) writes: “If God has assumed the task of protecting the patriarchs from misfortune during the course of their life, but fails to deliver them from that supreme misfortune which marks the definitive and absolute check upon their hopes, his protection is of little value. But it is inconceivable that God would provide for the patriarchs some partial tokens of deliverance and leave the final word to death, of which all the misfortunes and sufferings of human existence are only a foretaste. If the death of the patriarchs is the last word of their history, there has been a breach of the promises of God guaranteed by the covenant, and of which the formula “the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob” is the symbol. It is in fidelity to his covenant that God will resurrect the dead.” See also I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978).

<pause>

What's interesting is that the Sadducees *thought* that they understood Scripture, but in the parallel passages, Jesus says that they are *wrong* "because [they] know *neither* the Scriptures *nor* the power of God" (Matt. 22:29; cf. Mark 12:24).

May that *never* be said of us! May we not simply gloss over Scripture, give lip service to Scripture, or use Scripture to just affirm the way we're already living. But may we commit to diligently *be* in God's Word—to *understand* it, *believe* it, and be *transformed* by it. Let me offer a few suggestions on how to go about that.

[Suggestions for being in God's Word (to understand, believe, and be transformed by it)]

1. Start a Bible Reading Plan]

At the beginning of this year, if you're not already in a Bible Reading Plan, *start* one. There are recommended Bible Reading Plans on our church website under the Resources tab—anywhere from 10 days to 1 year. Find one that works for you, and commit to being in God's Word each day.

[Suggestions for being in God's Word (to understand, believe, and be transformed by it)]

1. Start a Bible Reading Plan
2. Join a Bible study group]

Join a Bible study group—whether that's Life Group or not. You don't need permission or something that is "church sanctioned" in order to study and apply God's Word together with others.

[Suggestions for being in God's Word (to understand, believe, and be transformed by it)]

1. Start a Bible Reading Plan
2. Join a Bible study group
3. Talk about God's Word with one another]

Talk about God's Word with one another. After Sunday Celebration, ask and share with one another what stood out to you from the passage that was just preached. We're not *just* a *community*, but we're a *new covenant* community—a spiritual family established and sustained by God's Word.

How tragic it would be if we only knew how to eat and hangout with one another, but we didn't know how to talk about God's Word in our lives—if we got really awkward whenever someone brought up what they were learning and applying in God's Word and if we never encouraged and challenged one another with God's Word.

[Suggestions for being in God's Word (to understand, believe, and be transformed by it)]

1. Start a Bible Reading Plan
2. Join a Bible study group
3. Talk about God's Word with one another
4. Commit to daily family worship]

If you're a husband or father, take the initiative to start and sustain daily family worship, where you read the Word, sing the Word, and pray the Word together. If you don't know where to start with that, check out the "Resources for Families" page under the Resources tab on our church website, or ask some of the other husbands and fathers in the church.

[Suggestions for being in God's Word (to understand, believe, and be transformed by it)]

1. Start a Bible Reading Plan

2. Join a Bible study group
3. Talk about God's Word with one another
4. Commit to daily family worship
5. Regularly join our corporate gatherings]

And at the most basic level, just start by regularly joining our corporate gatherings of Sunday Celebration and Prayer Gathering to hear sermons that explain and apply God's Word, to sing songs rich with truths from God's Word, and to pray prayers that are informed by God's Word.

In this new year, may it not be said of us that we know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God, but let's engulf ourselves in God's Word.

[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. ³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.]

Now, let's come back to Jesus' response. Whereas the Sadducees used a *hypothetical situation* to try to show the *absurdity* of the resurrection, Jesus goes straight to *Scripture* to one of the most *prominent* passages that the Sadducees and all the Jews would have recognized and shows them how *absurd* it would be for them to *deny* the resurrection.

To deny the resurrection would be equivalent to denying that God is a covenant-keeping God. And no pious Jew would ever have said that God does not keep his covenant with his people.

In other words, Jesus turns things around on the Sadducees and in essence asks them, "If you believe that God keeps his covenant with his people, how could you possibly *not* believe in the resurrection?"

It was another masterful response from Jesus.

So how do the religious leaders react?

Look at verses 39-40.

[³⁹ Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well." ⁴⁰ For they no longer dared to ask him any question.]

Note that, in verse 39, the "scribes" were mostly *Pharisees* (not Sadducees), and the Pharisees *agreed* with Jesus about there being life after death and the reality of the resurrection.²⁰

And since the Pharisees and Sadducees often debated this issue of the resurrection, and the Sadducees probably even brought up that very hypothetical situation with them, the Pharisees were finally pleased to see Jesus give the *perfect* answer from Scripture to settle the age-old debate with the Sadducees.²¹

And then, in verse 40, *nobody*—whether Pharisee or Sadducee—*dared* to ask Jesus any more questions. This was their *third* attempt at questioning Jesus, but the more they tried to *discredit* Jesus with questions, the *better* they made *him* look and the *worse* they embarrassed *themselves*.²² So they aren't willing to ask Jesus any more questions. And once again, Jesus effectively leaves them *marveling* and *silent* in his response.

²⁰ "Jewish Groups at the Time of the New Testament," in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

²¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse By Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

²² R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 367–368.

Conclusion

Now, in light of this passage, as we begin this new year, I want us to ask *ourselves* a question: “What *difference* would it make in my life if I lived each day *truly believing* in the *resurrection* age to come?”

The resurrection is *not* just a matter of *theological debate*, but it is a matter of *practical living*.

If there *is* a resurrection, then I do *not* need to squeeze everything out of this temporary life, but I will have all eternity to enjoy all this world has to offer.

If there *is* a resurrection, then I don’t need to remain frustrated, bitter, or upset with other people or my current circumstances because I know the day is coming when all my relationships and circumstances will be made right, and I can *begin* to live by faith in that *even* in this *present* life.

If there *is* a resurrection, then I want to do all that I can to share Christ with my family and friends and all those who don’t yet believe in him, so that they *also* might enjoy heaven with me.

Just think about it: some of the very people that you eat and hang out with, wouldn’t you want to continue spending time with them in the resurrection age to come?

<pause>

And as believers in Jesus Christ, the resurrection is *not* an “if,” but it is a *certainty*

- because God’s Word is true,
- because our God is a covenant-keeping God,
- and because our God came to not only *die* in our place but to *resurrect* as the firstfruits of our *own* resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23).

Because Christ resurrected from the dead, we can be certain that all of us who are united to him by faith will *also* be resurrected on the last day.

So may that *radically change* how we live each day of our *present* life until that day comes.

The One Thing

Let’s live by faith in the resurrection age to come.

Let’s pray.