

# Charmed

Luke 20:27-38

Sermon by Dan Schrock

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*<sup>27</sup>Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him <sup>28</sup>and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. <sup>29</sup>Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; <sup>30</sup>then the second <sup>31</sup>and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. <sup>32</sup>Finally the woman also died. <sup>33</sup>In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her."*

*<sup>34</sup>Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; <sup>35</sup>but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. <sup>36</sup>Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. <sup>37</sup>And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. <sup>38</sup>Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive." (NRSV)*

## I

If you have lived a charmed life, this sermon will not make much sense to you. If things in your life have almost always gone your way, if you have had lots of money, if you have had good health, and if success has come easily to you, then the rest of this sermon will not appeal to you.

But if you have tasted bitter defeat, if you have smacked your nose into a stone wall, if you have lived through pain beyond description, if you have struggled and strived and still failed, then perhaps you will find something here to sustain your days.

## II

I want to speak about the resurrection of the dead. Charmed people don't have much use for the resurrection of the dead. If my life cruises right along without bumps and the sun perpetually shines on me, why would I be interested in a resurrection of the dead? My life is excellent already. The idea of moving to a better existence will not lure me because I already possess everything I want.

The Sadducees lived a charmed life. They possessed all of the big three: position, power, and privilege. First, they had position. The Sadducees were positioned at the pinnacle of first century Jewish society. Together they formed a tiny, tightly-knit group of the highest ranking priests in Judaism. They controlled the Jerusalem temple. Which meant, secondly, that they were powerful. They cooperated with the Romans who had the military power to make sure no one overthrew the Sadducees. Third, the Sadducees had privilege. They lived in exceptionally fine houses, wore pricy clothes, and commanded public respect out on the street.

Perhaps it will not surprise you to hear that the Sadducees had no use for the resurrection. They had a charmed life, thank you very much, and found nothing appealing in the idea of a future existence that righted wrongs and healed brokenness. Their life was an A+, and what could be better than that?

### III

So when the Sadducees stopped Jesus out on the streets of Jerusalem to question him about the resurrection, we can see through their malarkey right away. They don't even believe in the resurrection! They're posing this question from a conviction of unbelief. They're pursuing intellectual debate, not honest search. It's a ruse to trap Jesus and make him look bad.

The ruse is an impossibly hypothetical question about a woman who bore no children after serial marriages to seven brothers. Whose wife will she be in the resurrection, Jesus? Brother 1, 3, 7?

Notice Jesus doesn't really answer their question. Their question focuses on the details of marriage, while Jesus' reply focuses mostly on God. In other words, Jesus rebukes them. In the first place, says Jesus, resurrection really happens. It's not a delusion. Secondly, resurrection is not about marriage—instead it's about

God. The distinguishing feature of resurrection is that we become alive to God and God becomes alive to us (20:38). God matters more than marriage.

#### IV

The New Testament doesn't give us many details about resurrected life. 1 Corinthians 15:51 says "we will all be changed," while 1 John 3:2 elaborates that "it does not yet appear what we shall be." So we'll be changed; we just don't know into what. Here in Luke 20, Jesus says we will be "like the angels" (v. 36), but that hardly clarifies things since we don't know much about angels. It's nice to hear we'll be like angels, but I, at least, don't what that means.

The resurrection is beyond our present experience. It's another world we haven't been to yet. To the extent we see it at all, we see it through a dark glass. To the extent we know it, we know it only through hope, through faith in a living God. We can only approach it through symbol.

Jesus points us toward a symbolic understanding of resurrection when he tells the Sadducees that in the burning bush Moses saw a symbol of the resurrection. According to Jesus, God essentially assures Moses at the burning bush that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive. Even though their ordinary human existence ended hundreds of years before Moses, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are now alive to God through the mechanism of resurrection.

The bush symbolizes this reality since its living flames burn without burning up. Moses stands there on ground so holy he has to remove his sandals. As he gazed into the eternal flame, God speaks and for the first time reveals to any human being the name "Yahweh," the One who was and is and shall be. This is indeed a holy moment.

In the scriptural and theological imagination of Jesus, the interaction between Moses and God at the burning bush illustrates what resurrected life is

like. Perhaps we can find 4 parallels between resurrection and Moses' experience at the burning bush.

First, in the resurrection God is the compelling reality. In the resurrection God will mesmerize us, just as God mesmerized Moses at the bush. In resurrection our whole life, our whole being, turns toward God and does not look away. We are transfixed.

Second, the resurrection is like standing on holy soil and hearing holy words from the mouth of God.

Third, in resurrection our worldview gets adjusted. Moses learned at the bush that Pharaoh is not in charge after all, that slavery and injustice will not stand, that God will make the social order right and good. So too might our worldview get adjusted in resurrection. God will tell us things we have not heard before and declare what we have not imagined before.

Fourth, in resurrection we are given new energy, new purpose, new wholeness, like Moses was given new energy and purpose.

In resurrection we enter fully into the extravagant love and fiery communion of God. The hope of resurrection is precious to people who've tasted the salt of defeat, sobbed through the blues of suffering, or sat in the strewn wreckage of crashed dreams.

There is much we don't know about resurrection because the New Testament doesn't tell us much. But when it happens to us, it will surely charm the sandals right off our feet.