

## Band of Puzzlers

Scriptures: Job 19:23-27; Luke 20:27-38

**Pharisees and Sadducees**

If you spend any amount of time reading the gospels, you frequently see Jesus butting heads with some of the religious people of the day – folks like the chief priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. The Jewish faith in those days had about as many different versions, as what the Christian faith has today, we just don't hear a lot about them. The Pharisees were what we would call "liberals," or "progressives," today, while the Sadducees were the "conservatives." The Sadducees were generally more wealthy and aristocratic than the Pharisees, and they only believed in the first five books of the Bible.

The Pharisees believed in the entire Old Testament. The Pharisees were also more popular with the people. But the Sadducees were the ones who held all the high positions in the Jewish religion, because they were alright with Rome running things, as long as Rome left them and the temple alone. We're going to take a look at a conversation Jesus had with a group of Sadducees at the temple, after He had just stumped a group of Pharisees who had questioned Him about paying taxes to Caesar. If you have a Bible, or a Bible app handy, turn with me to Luke 20:27-38. **Read Luke 20:27-38.**

**All Saint's Day at Alpha Center**

Tuesday night a group of us went down to Alpha Center to be Jesus' hands and feet in a literal way to people less fortunate than ourselves. They moved out next to the Sheriff's Department over a year ago into an old church building, where they also run a homeless shelter. For years they were in downtown Sidney. I'll never forget the first time I went down and helped serve a meal – it makes you appreciate just how blessed you are. Seeing how some of the people live, you realize that the problems we face are insignificant in comparison to what they have to deal with on a daily basis.

I'd estimate that we served fifty people down there Tuesday night. And of course, I preached – on the topic of All Saint's Day – since that's what Tuesday was in the church calendar. The Scripture passage we looked at this morning wasn't one on my radar to use with the people at the Alpha Center, but it could have worked. Luke records that "Some of the Sadducees who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question," (verse 27).

See, the Sadducees were as messed up as some people we have running around here today. They held high offices in the Jewish political and religious arena, but they didn't understand what God is all about. We see that, too, in the Church. There are always going to be people who attempt to discount and minimize the belief

systems of other people. That's just human nature – we think we are right, and anyone who thinks differently is wrong. Of course, if there's no resurrection, then there's no saints – it goes back to the topic we talked about a few weeks ago about simply living for today.

### **A Hypothetical Situation**

So they see that Jesus has stumped the Pharisees, and they decide, since they are right about everything, you know, that maybe where the Pharisees failed, they might succeed. So they want to try to stump Jesus. “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 raise up offspring for his brother,’” (verse 28). This idea is a throw-back to things which happened in the book of Genesis, where Judah says to his second son, Onan, “Lie with your brother’s wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother,” (Gen. 38:8).

Aren't you glad people aren't running around telling us we have to do that? Well, they proceed to set up what has to be a hypothetical situation. The Sadducees say, “Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children,” (Luke 20:29-31). I don't know, but if something like this happened today, I would think the authorities would be getting involved and investigating the lady. To have seven different husbands, and they all die – it sounds suspicious, doesn't it?

Of course, these Sadducees are really blowing this hypothetical situation out of proportion. Then they throw in the comment, that “Finally, the woman died too,” (verse 32). Now comes their question – and remember, these guys don't believe in the resurrection, they are trying to make Jesus look foolish in front of the people – they ask, “At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?” (verse 33). They aren't really looking for an answer – they don't believe in the resurrection anyhow.

### **A Bunch of Riddlers**

When I was a kid, there used to be reruns on television of Batman and Robin, starring Adam West and Burt Ward. Anyone ever see any of those? In each episode, Batman and Robin would face off against a different villain, or a combination of them – Eartha Kitt as Catwoman, Cesar Romero as the Joker, Burgess Meredith as the Penguin, and Frank Gorshin as the Riddler. The Riddler wore a green suit covered with black question marks and loved trying to stump Batman and Robin with riddles. Questions. Mind games and puzzles. He would always start his antics with the line, “Riddle me this, Batman.”

These Sadducees are a bunch of Riddlers – Puzzlers – trying to trip Jesus up. They think they are really clever, but in their attempt to make a fool of Jesus, He sets them straight. “Jesus replied, ‘The people of this age marry and are given in marriage.

But 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,” (verses 34-35). Jesus makes the point that we do things a certain way for now, because we’re living inside human skins, in a sin-sickened world, but things are going to be different for us in the future. That’s what Jesus is getting at here.

He goes on, and tells the Sadducees, “and they can no longer die; for they are like angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection,” (verse 36). If you have a Bible with red letters in it, those words are in red. Jesus truly said that. Because we trust in Jesus Christ to save us from sin and death at the cross, He gives us the promise of being God’s children and eternal life. Other religions – Buddhism, Islam, even Judaism – you live the best life you possibly can right now, because there’s no guarantee of anything after death. Being a follower of Jesus Christ is unlike any other religion or faith in the world – we see it right here – Jesus Himself tells us there is life with Him after this body dies.

### **Humbly Moving On**

Have you ever had a disagreement with someone, and even with overwhelming evidence, they still wouldn’t, or couldn’t, see what you were saying? They couldn’t understand the point you were making or trying to make? I’ve been there. I’ve been on both sides of that coin. I suspect, if we were all being honest – we could all say that. There have been times in the past, when I’ve been proven wrong, but in my own self-important bigness – that’s a phrase I made that up, I don’t know how else to say it – I refused to admit I was wrong.

As I age, and spend time daily in the Scriptures and prayer, I’m slowly becoming more wise and humble. On the other hand, there have also been times when I was right. In those instances, I’ve found that humbly moving on, and not gloating over a win has been the most beneficial course to take. It all boils down to being open to the possibility that perhaps God is going to use someone in a way we don’t expect, to do what God needs to be done to show the world how amazing and remarkable He is.

Jesus understands that. He gets us – oftentimes better than we understand ourselves. He knew what the Sadducees believed that day in the temple. He knew what parts of the Bible they believed in. So He crafts a response to show them that the assumption they have of things done in heaven as they are on earth is wrong.

### **Surrounded by a Great Cloud of Witnesses**

He brings up Moses, their hero, when He says, “In the account of the burning 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.’ He [God] is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to Him all are alive,” (verses 37-38). So friends, we have that assurance, even today – that God is the God of the living. Some of the saints we’ve

known and loved here over the years, even though they have died and we cannot presently see them – they are still alive to Him. Of course, because we love and follow Jesus, we are also saints. Did you know that?

You're a saint. Not in the sense of a statue of someone you might find in a church, but in the sense that Jesus gives you His own holiness at the cross, and swaps it for your sin. He makes us right with God, and with others. It's up to us, then, to let the Holy Spirit come in and sweep all the cobwebs out of our hearts and minds so that we "move onward to perfection," as John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, would say.

Momentarily, we'll receive again the Sacrament of Holy Communion. On this first Sunday of November, following All Saint's Day, I am more aware – and I hope you are as well – that "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart," (Heb. 12:1-3).

**Prayer:** Eternally Righteous God, Merciful Judge of all the living: in Your love You called us to share the glory of Christ. Strengthen our hearts in every good work and word, that we may be steadfast in Your ways and always believe Your truth. Amen.