

²⁷ Some 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 raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. ³⁰ The second ³¹ and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. ³² Finally, the woman died too. ³³ Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

³⁴ Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵ But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶ and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection. ³⁷ But 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.’^[u] ³⁸ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

³⁹ Some of the teachers of the law responded, “Well said, teacher!” ⁴⁰ And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

How to lose a debate

The way to tell whether or not someone has lost an argument before they get started is the attack. Rather than bring down their opponent through logic and a reasonable thought process – they’ll appeal to insult and mockery because it’s easier to make fun of someone rather than to prove them wrong. Now there are a number of ways to do that but in our lesson we see a reduction to the absurd. It’s when your parents asked you, “If all of your friends were jumping off a bridge would you?” Look how ridiculous this is and how foolish you are for believing it!

What the Sadducees are trying to do is make Jesus look like a fool by pointing out the absurdity of what he believes. They want to make Jesus feel and look stupid. They don’t necessarily attack Jesus’ person but they mock God’s Word and downplay doctrine. That is as good as attack Jesus the very Word made flesh and lived among us.

And that’s a common occurrence in a world that knows better than God. It’s an attitude that looks down on everyone else because there is nothing that they can be taught but then imagine they reduce your hope to the absurd, but in doing so demonstrate they don’t understand it at all. It’s at that point you could jump on them, show them to be a fool or point out their folly for the sake of instruction. Jesus doesn’t insult them or ignore their question. He takes their question seriously and corrects their misunderstanding not only of marriage, angles, but also eternal life in heaven.

Jesus then comforts us with that same word and assures us: there is a resurrection and God has everything carefully planned. Live for the life to come not because you are worthy but because God has made you worthy through his son.

This is the third attack, the Pharisees have failed twice and now the Sadducees, the intellectual elite, step up to the task. They aren’t interested in how to word their wedding vows. They want to humiliate Jesus because he’s been rocking the boat and upsetting the religious and political order. If they want to protect their position they have to bring Jesus down. So they come to Jesus with a question concerning the Law of Moses: the Levirate Law. The Levirate law said that if a man dies and leaves behind a widow without any children his brother is supposed to marry his brother’s wife and any children born to him are in order to perpetuate his brother’s family. It was a way of taking care of widows in a time without a social system. The brother was to take care of his brother’s wife. This

situation is pushed to the extreme: after the third brother I imagine the fourth would be planning his funeral right alongside his wedding.

The Sadducees push the example even further and even seem to laugh at the idea. It's an exceptional situation in order to make a mockery of the resurrection and in so doing laugh at Jesus and his teaching. *So there were seven brothers. The first took a wife and died childless.* ³⁰ *The second took her as a wife,* ^[d] ³¹ *and so did the third, and in the same way the seven died and left no children.* ³² *Finally the woman died too.* ³³ *So in the resurrection, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as a wife."* Let's see if Jesus can defend his silly belief of the bodily resurrection now! It's worked before but Jesus has an answer that relies on the Word of God. Grammar is important, be it an active or a passive verb, whether or not it is singular or plural. Imperatives are not Indicatives. That means you shouldn't take commands in scripture and assume, "I can do them."

Jesus takes their question seriously and answers it with, *"The people of this age marry and are given in marriage.* ³⁵ *But those who are considered worthy to experience that age and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage.* ³⁶ *In fact, they cannot die any more, for they are like the angels.* Jesus says, "Your assumption about the nature of heaven is wrong. Marriage doesn't exist there. Marriage is not needed there. Marriage is meant to perpetuate and stabilize society. Marriage is meant to protect women from men who want to take advantage of them. Marriage is meant to protect the family especially children. But in heaven it won't be necessary because there will be perfect peace with God and one another. No one will take advantage of another. Life will be different in heaven.

Thankfully, the Levirate law is no longer in effect. You don't have to worry about stepping in for your brother and marrying your sister in law any time soon. But I do worry about my family and their future. After all, with me anything is possible. It's only by the grace of God that I've made it this far, but just imagine, that I've arrived in heaven well ahead of my wife and children and there I sit by the gate and wait, and wait, and wait, until Angela arrives and then there's someone else with her, "Who's that?" He's my brother in Christ but this side of heaven it just seems so awkward. I'm certain we will still have that strong bond in heaven but there is no need for marriage in heaven. Hopefully I don't hear any sighs of relief because we say, "Till death do us part." Marriage is intended to perpetuate and stabilize society. Marriage is meant to care for the family, especially women and children. But society likes to say, "Marriage is a way of saying, "I love you." Marriage is so much more than that. I can tell my children I love them without getting married to them. Just as society gets marriage wrong they also get heaven wrong.

Heaven is altogether different but many imagine heaven is a boring place where we get a harp and sit on a cloud for alle eternity. In heaven we will be like the angels. That doesn't mean we will be angels, asexual beings. It means we are beyond the reach of death, sickness, and sin. That doesn't mean we will look like them or get wings, but it does mean we will live forever and there will be a fixed number of people. There will be no need for marriage.

But the devil wants us to laugh, mock, ridicule scripture. Reduce this down to the absurd and we may have many of the same questions as the Sadducees. Our sinful nature refuses to be instructed and formed by the Word of God, it would rather form and instruct God. We don't want anyone telling us what to think, not even God, and so we'll concoct a God who does not tell me what to think but rather approves of all I do. Yes Idolatry comes in the form of "wisdom." They give up on the clear words of God and worship their own thoughts. Like these Sadducees they turn to ridiculing the Word of God making a mockery of it so as to prove themselves wise. Sometimes we act like the Sadducees – act and live as if we have to have it all here and now. We need everything. We want everything and if we don't get it... we'll prefer to wallow in the filth of this world rather than rejoice in the riches of heaven. For that God should mock and ridicule our foolishness by reducing us and our "wisdom" down to the absurd.

It's easy to see others mocking the Word of God – but I know, I do the same thing. I struggle with scripture and what to explain away the clear portions that hurt or are offensive. My sinful nature wants to say, "6 day

creation” – right. Roles for men and women – that won't work in an enlightened world. And worst of all are the times I doubt the ability of scripture and the power of the Holy Spirit to change hearts and lives of people.

Jesus takes our mockery and seriously answers our questions. He carefully explains to the Sadducees that the Word of God is more carefully crafted than they care to think. That word works.

If the Sadducees had believed Jesus, they wouldn't have looked for ways to trap him in his own words and ensnare him with hypothetical questions about some fictitious women married to seven brothers. Instead, they would have asked are we among those considered worthy to experience the resurrection? They thought they could have their best life now but Jesus speaks about the resurrection

The Sadducees didn't believe in the afterlife or angels. They didn't take the Word of God seriously. They only accepted the first five books, also known as the Torah. The prophets and the writings weren't authoritative. So Jesus appeals to the words they take seriously. *Even Moses showed in the account about the burning bush that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord: 'The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'* ⁴⁶ ³⁸ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all are alive to him. Jesus points back to Moses and the burning bush, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” I'm not the God of the dead but of the living.” That Living God has done something for the dead. They aren't dead. He has given his life so that they might live eternally. Jesus paid the price for every rebellion, mockery, ridicule of his word. Here he takes one step closer to the cross and the reason he has come to Jerusalem. There he would die for people who would more than mock him, they would kill him. This is how you are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead. You are made worthy. You are connected to Christ in baptism and his resurrection is your resurrection. You are worthy because he has made you that way.

God isn't the god of the dead but of the living. He has brought us to life. He has given us his name. He has called us his own. And when he comes again our bodies will be raised. That leads us to the next question what people always have about heaven. “Will I have the same body, Because I was hoping for an upgrade.” It will be the same but there will be some upgrades. Our resurrected bodies won't grow old, run out of time for hobbies, or become exhausted or injured. We will be with the Lord forever.

We are just passing through to eternity. We eagerly look forward to going home and being welcomed into eternity, not only by the friends we have won, but by our father in heaven. Leave behind the pictures of heaven the world parades before us of a boring place. In pride don't think Scripture can't teach or inform you. Keep your mind open to the instruction that comes from the Word of God. Keep your focus on heaven. You can't have your best life now when we know the best life is to come. There is our best life and it is for eternity.

Some may mock you or ridicule your beliefs but that should come as no surprise. They did the same to Jesus. But a personal attack doesn't demonstrate anything other than that they don't have a leg to stand on. Eternal life isn't an argument to absurdity it is a promise to believe. Given to you by a gracious God who counters our foolishness with his Word. Amen.