

Resurrection – Will There Be One
Luke 20:27-40

As I read these words of this passage, I am again reminded of a testimony that my oldest son gave in one of our church services. In his testimony he said over and over again that our life's journey is made up of a series of choices. And that is so very true. And the words of Deuteronomy chapter 30 echo that truth very clearly.

And as I have pondered my son's testimony over these later years, I've come to understand that such choices are very intentionally placed in the pathway in front of us by our Lord.

Listen to these words carefully. Here, beginning in verse 15 of Deuteronomy 30, we read,

¹⁵ "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you . . .

¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days.

(Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

I ponder the meaning of these words often. Because one of the modern day prevailing philosophies that I heard being discussed on one of the morning television news programs recently used the words, "my truth, is my truth. Your truth may be different than mine. And that's OK, because what is true for you may not be true for me".

Consider those words for a moment folks! Those people were insisting that even though a matter may not be "truth" at all, just because they want it to be truth, they "make it to be their truth", and it becomes "truth" to them. And oh dear friends, I must say that for me such rationale is utter foolishness. And it calls to mind the choices our Lord is speaking about here in Deuteronomy chapter 30.

Why are these thoughts coming to my mind as I read this passage that we'll study here today? It's because the most important choices that we will ever make in this life will have to do with the "truths" that are given within these scriptures. And above all else, we must get those "truths" right. Everything else comes second.

Here in these words, we'll read where some within the Hebrew religious leadership, the Sadducees, have brought a question to the Lord Jesus, a question that was based on a flawed understanding of these scriptures and was obviously intended to trick and beguile the Lord Jesus into saying something wrong.

Their question was about the "Resurrection". And it was well known that the Sect of the Sadducees had made the choice to not believe in the Resurrection, one of those choices that the words of Deuteronomy 30 warns us about.

Let's pause and read about this encounter, here given in Luke chapter 20 beginning in verse 27.

²⁷ Then came to him certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him, ²⁸ Saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. ²⁹ There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children. ³⁰ And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. ³¹ And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also: and they left no children, and died. ³² Last of all the woman died also. ³³ Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife. ³⁴ And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: ³⁵ But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: ³⁶ Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. ³⁷ Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him. ³⁹ Then certain of the scribes answering said, Master, you have well said. ⁴⁰ And after that they dared not ask him any question at all. (Luke 20:27-40)

Over the many months that we have studied through these gospels, the religious leadership that has most been in opposition to the Lord Jesus have been the Scribes and the Pharisees. But here, we find this religious sect called "Sadducees" having some of the same kinds of confrontations with the Lord Jesus.

We don't know nearly as much about the Sadducees as we do about the Scribes and the Pharisees, though they are mentioned often in these gospels. What we do know is that the Sadducees seemingly shared equal power and position and leadership with the Pharisees, especially in matters regarding religion.

As to their beliefs, it seems that the Sadducees chose the pathway spoken about in Deuteronomy chapter 30, making choices in what they wanted to believe about God, some of those choices being good, but other of their choices being very wrong. And seemingly also to choose the pathway being made by some of our modern day thinkers, and having a "truth" that was their own.

While the Sadducees were said to have more devoutly held to the teachings of Moses than even did the Pharisees, they seemed to have a very limited acceptance of the writings of the prophets.

And similar to the beliefs of the Deists of our day, the Sadducees believed that God stood far off from the daily activities of men, even to the point of denying His involvement in everyday life. That kind of belief required them to rely upon their own sense of right and wrong, good and evil. And folks, that never really works well.

They also denied any form of resurrection from the dead, refusing to believe in any manner of afterlife, holding that the soul perished at death, therefore denying any penalty or reward beyond their earthly existence.

They also denied the existence of the spiritual world, of angels and demons. Why they held such erroneous beliefs, we can't know.

Concerning the resurrection, surely they had read all the many scriptural references concerning the afterlife, such as the words of Solomon given in

Ecclesiastes 12, where he said about death, "and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

And also, where the Prophet Daniel had said regarding angels and regarding the coming Day of Judgment. Listen to some of those words given in Daniel chapter 12.

¹ "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:1-2)

Perhaps it was words about the resurrection like these last words here in Daniel 12:2 that caused the Sadducees to declare that there would be no life beyond their present days. These words clearly bespeak an impending accountability for the behaviors shown while in this life.

I am convinced that that is why most all those who declare that there will be no resurrection want to believe such things.

Accountability and especially God's retribution for sinful behavior committed during this life is a fearful thing to look forward too! A thief, a liar, an adulterer, a murderer does not want to be caught and punished. And that would be especially so if they knew that their punishment would be eternal damnation in hell.

Whatever the motive might be for their "rewriting" of scripture to accommodate their wrong beliefs, it still continues today in some of the largest of our modern day religious cults, people doing as those television talk show hosts were doing, creating their own version of "truth" and trying to convince others that it is real truth.

The Jehovah's Witnesses also deny the existence of the traditional Christian view of Hell. In their ungodly beliefs, satan is said to have created the concept of hellfire in order to turn people against God. They believe that hell is the "common grave of mankind" where people go when they die.

True believers are said to remain in their state of death until the resurrection, at which time, those who are of the specially chosen 144,000 will live and reign in heaven, while all the other believers will inherit the new earth.

But the bodies of the unbelievers simply remain in the grave and their souls just cease to exist.

The Mormons likewise have their own version of "truth". They do not believe in hell as a physical place of punishment and torment. They don't want to believe that a "just" God would inflict physical pain and torture on His children. Rather, for them hell is a mental state in the next life where those who have knowingly rejected Jesus Christ and lived lives of selfishness and wickedness will have a perfect recollection of their guilt. And only after they have paid the appropriate price will they be given a place in God's eternal kingdom.

The Unitarian Universalist Church is generous to its members in allowing them to adopt their own preferred version of truth. But according to their official stated doctrines, very few Unitarian Universalists believe in a continuing, individualized existence after physical death. Even fewer believe in the physical existence of places called heaven or hell where one goes after dying. They instead say, "We believe immortality manifests itself in the lives of those we affect during our lifetime and in the legacy we leave when we die."

While such beliefs as these might seem so very foolish to you and me, we must understand that most of these people are very passionate about what they believe, just as were these Sadducees.

And while we can't know exactly how all these many beliefs began, it seems that most often it has to do with a humanistic concept of right and wrong, with some people simply believing the "truth" that they have "chosen" for themselves. And it gets worked out in such statements as the Mormons give, that "a just God would not inflict physical pain and torture on His children."

Regarding such errant and ungodly beliefs, may I simply say that a person must exercise great caution in their presumptions about the Holy nature of God! When a person, with our small and finite minds, tries to understand and give a human definition to the infinite nature of God, we are treading on perilous ground.

In a very real sense, a person is in danger of remaking God into the image that they prefer Him to be, similar to the explanation given in Isaiah 44. Listen for a moment to these words about a man creating his own idea of God.

¹³ The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. ¹⁴ He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest . . . ¹⁵ Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. ¹⁶ Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" ¹⁷ And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" (Isaiah 44:13-17)

How very foolish these words sound to us, but folks, if we are not very, very careful, we too can do the very same thing with God Almighty. We will re-create Him into the image that suits our preferences. And then, just as with this wooden idol, we will fall down before Him and worship Him. But it will really not be Him at all, but only our re-created version of Him.

And again, the Sadducees did that! And today, the Jehovah's Witnesses do that! The Mormons do that! The Unitarians and the Muslims and the Hindu and the Buddhists do that! And it goes on and on, each religion re-creating God into the image that they want him to be, not realizing that their god is then, no god at all.

The exact reason why these Sadducees settled on there being no resurrection is not given to us, but we do know for sure why they were standing there before Jesus that day, asking the question that they were asking.

Folks, I know that I keep saying these same words over and over to us, but I want to always keep us reminded of such things. The real reason that any of us stand before Jesus is told to us in the simple words of John 6:44 where He said,

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.
(John 6:44)

And then, to make sure that we understood His words, he said it again a few verses later in John 6:65,

⁶⁵ . . . "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." (John 6:65)

Those Sadducees were drawn to Jesus that day by God the Father so that they could hear "real truth".

Do all those who are drawn to Jesus receive Him as Savior and Lord? He surely wants them too, because He does not desire that any should perish. But unfortunately, the answer to that question is no, not even many, only a few truly receive Him as Savior and Lord! As in the words given by Jesus speaking about the great "Wedding Banquet", He said in Matthew chapter 22 that "many are called, but few are chosen."

But they surely are given the opportunity, just as were these Sadducees. Though they be errant in their beliefs and in complete opposition to Christ, He did want them to hear the "real truth", to turn and to be saved. He came to seek and to save those who are lost.

Another reason for these encounters being recorded in the scriptures is so that you and I can read these words and know the "real truths" about God, so that we might not fall victim to the wiles of the evil one and be caught up in trying to develop our own version of "truth", to recreate our own image of God.

And we can, and even innocently so! The things that we "do not know" truly can hurt us. Just as we ought to be wary of walking down a dark backstreet alleyway, so also should we be wary of not knowing the "real truths" of God.

Those words in 1 Peter 5:8 are a strong warning to us,

⁸ Be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

We really must not be foolish folks. We must diligently place ourselves under the teaching of God's word. We must be faithful to attend church and Sunday school and bible studies, and spend time in personal study of our bible. That is how God speaks "His truth" into our hearts and minds, through His Word. And every time that we "opt out" of an opportunity to hear or read or study God's word, it is to our loss.

But let me also give us a warning about some dangers that may lie in our paths even as we diligently seek after God's word.

Again, satan is so very clever as he roams to and fro seeking whom he may devour. If any of us has a propensity to want to believe such things as these Sadducees believed, then satan will very generously accommodate our desires. We are warned in 2 Timothy 4,

³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Yes, the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses have done this, but folks, many also within our mainline denominations have done this. They seek out preachers who say things they want to hear.

If you listen carefully to the words of these Sadducees, you can hear the cleverness of satan oozing forth through their words, as they present all these circumstances of marriage and giving in marriage and asking "to whom will the wife be wed when she gets to heaven"?

This is a very emotional issue to most wives, and even also, to many husbands. If you were to ask my wife what her desire would be, I believe that she would say that she would want to be married to me for all eternity.

And to simply say, as Jesus did, that marriage, such as takes place during our days on the earth will be no more. That can be a hurtful reality for some to accept. And yes, those ones would probably welcome another version of the truth, even to the extent of there being no afterlife at all.

Yes, satan surely will use any means of devouring us. He will appeal to our deepest emotions if those emotions will lead us astray from the truth.

And perhaps it was for some of these very reasons that the Sadducees chose to believe that there would be no resurrection.

Certainly also, for the reason that I mentioned earlier, that deep and foreboding threat of accountability and judgment for a sinful existence during our days on earth, that would cause most folks to hope that there would be no resurrection,

or at least cause some to turn to the alternatives that the Jehovah's witnesses and the Mormons offer.

My dear friends, there really is no such thing as "Your Truth" or "My Truth". There is only "One Truth" and that "Truth" is found only in Jesus Christ in these Scriptures.

And so, I beg us to turn to and to believe only in these deep truths of God's word. Though they often be difficult to accept and endure, they are the only real truth that exists and they are the only means of our eternal salvation.

And yes, as my dear son insisted in his testimony, we really do need to make a choice, the right choice and to choose the Lord Jesus as our Savior.

We will conclude here for today. But the Lord willing, we'll continue with this passage next week, because the resurrection really is real and it holds a promise far more pleasing to us than the dark eternal grave that the Sadducees foresaw!

I'll close with these simple words of our Lord,

¹⁹ . . .choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days. (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

Pray with me.