

INTRODUCTION

A little church sent their search committee to interview a young preacher as a prospective pastor. This fellow was young, and he was not very nice looking, but he seemed sincere. The chairman of the search committee asked the nervous young man if he knew the Bible. He said, “Yessir. I know the Bible real well.” The chairman asked, “What part of the Bible do you like?” He said, “I like the New Testament.” The chairman said, “Well, why don’t you tell us the story of the Prodigal Son?”

The young preacher swallowed and said, “There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus who had two sons. They younger son went down to Jericho by night for some riotous living, as he was riding in his fiery chariot, he caught his hair in a tree limb and he hung there—for 40 days and 40 nights. Finally, Delilah came out and cut off his hair and he fell on the stony ground—and the thorns grew up and choked him half to death. The next morning Solomon and his wife Gomorrah came by and carried him down to the boat dock and he caught a ship to Nineveh. When he got there he saw Queen Jezebel sitting on the wall, and he said, ‘Toss her down, boys,’ and they said, ‘How many times shall we toss her down, seven times? And he said, ‘Nay, but seventy times seven,’ so they chunked her down...and she burst asunder in their midst...and they picked up twelve baskets of the fragments that remained...and in the resurrection whose wife will she be?”

When he finished the chairperson said to the committee, “Folks, he’s not very good looking, but he really knows the Bible—let’s call him as our pastor!”

Of course all those statements come from *somewhere* in the Bible. That last question: “In the Resurrection, whose wife shall she be?” comes from the passage of scripture we’re studying today. It was a few days before the cross. As Jesus taught in Jerusalem, He faced a hostile audience comprised of the Jewish religious leaders. It was a theological boxing match between Israel’s leading scholars and this carpenter from Nazareth. Let’s examine three “rounds” of this verbal fight. As we introduce each round, we’ll read the accompanying passage of scripture.

ROUND ONE: A RIDICULOUS QUESTION

In Luke 20 Jesus’ enemies tried three knock-out punches in the form of trick questions. Question #1: “Where do you get your authority?” (20:2); Question #2 “Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (20:22). The third loaded question is found beginning in Luke 20:27:

Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. “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 have children for his brother. 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. Finally, the woman died too. Now, then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?” Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy to taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will never marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no

longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection. But in the account of the 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 is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him, all are alive. Some of the teachers of the law said, “Well said, teacher!” And no one dared ask him any more questions.

Perhaps you’ve seen or heard of the 1954 movie, “Seven Brides for Seven Brothers.” In 33 A.D. the Sadducees presented Jesus with the story of “One Bride for Seven Brothers.” The Sadducees were a small, but influential group in Jerusalem. They were the aristocrats—the high priest was always a Sadducee. They were much more liberal than the Pharisees. The Sadducees didn’t believe in angels, or demons, or miracles, or an after-life—that’s why they were *sad-you-see*.

In Deuteronomy 25 there is a directive saying if a married man died without a son, his next oldest brother received all his property—including his wife. The brother of the deceased was obligated to marry his sister-in-law and try to have children. If her husband’s brother refused to marry her, she could spit in his face and take his sandals and he would be publicly shamed. So most brothers obliged by marrying their brother’s widow. Then if the wife had a son by her new husband, the son would carry on her dead husband’s name and claim his property. Since females had no rights, she needed a son to protect her rights—so the law was given to protect widows.

The Sadducees took this obscure law and extrapolated it to a worst-case scenario: seven brothers marrying the same woman—and each of them dying. I can imagine husbands numbers five, six, and seven weren’t too happy about marrying her. It reminds me of the real-life serial murderer nicknamed “Arsenic Annie” who was arrested in 1954 in Tulsa, Oklahoma for killing her husband. Investigators discovered she poisoned eleven people—including five of her husbands. She shot one of her husbands, and when asked why she shot him, she replied, “Because he wouldn’t eat the soup.”

Now, I believe if I had been the fifth or sixth brother, I would have taken the spit in the face and handed her my sandals! Or at least, I’d let my dog sample her meatloaf before I ate it! But, of course, this is simply a ridiculous, fictitious example. After presenting the case study, I can imagine the speaker paused, smiled, and glanced at the other Sadducees before he delivered his theological uppercut: “Now, then (giggle) at the Resurrection (laugh) whose wife will she be? The Sadducees didn’t even believe there would be an afterlife!

Actually, if you’ve ever been married more than once, it’s not a bad question. There’s a tombstone in a graveyard in London dating back to the 19th century. Inscribed on it are these words: “Seven wives I’ve buried with a many a fervent prayer. If we meet in heaven, won’t there be trouble there?” Some of you have been married to more than one person. When you get to heaven, what is your relationship going to be with your ex-husbands, and ex-wives? Jesus gives a profound answer to such a ridiculous question. In these few verses, we can extract three very important details about life after the resurrection or the rapture.

1. Earthly relationships will be overshadowed

Jesus said at the resurrection the “dead will neither marry (verb) or be given in marriage (verb).” In other words, there won’t be any new marriage ceremonies in heaven. There will only be *one* marriage celebration in heaven—the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7) where Christ will consummate His oneness with His Bride—the church. So if you aren’t married here, don’t expect to go to heaven and meet someone and ask them, “will you marry me?”

I know some of you girls are waiting for the perfect guy. There’s actually no such thing as a perfect guy—but in heaven, we will be like Jesus. But sorry, Jesus said you can’t wait until you get to heaven to get married.

In heaven, our relationship with the Living God will be so powerful our earthly relationships will seem to be insignificant in comparison. I like the way Eugene Petersen paraphrases Jesus’ words: “Marriage is a preoccupation here, but not there. Those who are included in the resurrection of the dead will no longer be concerned with marriage. They’ll have better things to think about, if you can believe it. All ecstasies and intimacies then will be with God.” (*The Message*)

Cindy and I have been married almost 29 years. She knows me better than anyone on earth, and loves me more than anyone on earth. The unity we feel as husband and wife now is just a foretaste of the kind of *oneness* we’ll enjoy in heaven. Often when Cindy and I pray together, we embrace each other—at that moment I feel a powerful spiritual connection with her. When we get to heaven, our relationship will even be sweeter. But we’ll both be so consumed with Jesus we won’t be thinking of each other as husband and wife. We’ll all be so in love with Jesus that in comparison, marriage becomes insignificant.

By the way, this teaching contradicts an important Mormon doctrine—Celestial Marriage. Now, Mormons—who call themselves The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—are some of the nicest folks I’ve ever met, but don’t think for one minute they believe what we do about heaven. They teach if a couple is married in a Mormon Temple, their marriage becomes a celestial marriage that will exist throughout all eternity. Mormons believe they can eventually establish and populate other worlds such as this one, provided they have a celestial marriage partner (or partners) with whom they can produce spirit children in the celestial kingdom. They believe the Mormon husband can become a heavenly father and his wife (or wives) a heavenly mother of millions of newly created human souls. (“Achieving a Celestial Marriage”, Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, 1976, p. 129) And Jesus said in heaven, marriage is *not* the point.

2. We’ll be God’s children, and we’ll be like the angels

Contrary to popular folklore, when we die, we DO NOT become angels—we become LIKE the angels. Jesus said we will never die. There is no reference in the Bible to an angel birth or an angel funeral. Contrary to the Cupid myth, there is no reference in the Bible to baby angels—or senior citizen angels. There are no married angels. Angels are spirits sent from God to serve His people. (Hebrews 1:14) Angels are constantly worshiping and serving God—and so will we. (If you want more information, you can read my book *Do Angels Really Exist?*)

Jesus said we’ll be LIKE the angels, but He said we ARE the children of God. Does that mean we’ll all look and act like little children in heaven? Is God going to be operating a day care in heaven? No, it means we’ll have the same simple, carefree attitude of kids. When you were a kid, life was so simple it consisted of just getting up, getting dressed, and eating the food placed in front of you. Somebody else was handling all the details of your life. In the same way, I believe heaven will allow us to be kids again–God’s children. There will be no deadlines, no funerals, no hospitals, no wars, no arthritis, no Alzheimer’s. You won’t have to spend time worrying about your kids and grand kids–you’ll be a kid! As Isaiah says, “the former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.” (Isaiah 65:17)

3. We’ll live with the living God

The Sadducees didn’t believe in the resurrection of the dead, but Jesus delivered a crushing counterpunch by referring to Moses’ experience at the burning bush. (Exodus 3) God said, “I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” His logic is irrefutable. Let me explain it in simple terms. My earthly dad, Orlo Dykes, died over 20 years ago. My brother, Dan, is alive and living in Arkansas. If a stranger who knew my dad meets me they will say, “I was (past tense) a friend of your dad, Orlo,” That would be the correct statement since my dad is dead. If someone who knows my brother meets me, they will say, “I am (present tense) a friend of your brother, Dan.” See the difference? It’s all in the tense of the verbs.

When God appeared to Moses, Abraham had been dead over 500 years. But God didn’t say, “I was the God of Abraham.” He said, “I AM the God of Abraham.” That phrase “I AM” is God’s own testimony that Abraham was still living. Jesus’ argument was so compelling, even some of His enemies had to award him points. At that point, the religious leaders stopped asking questions.

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 1:25-26) Do you believe that? If you know Jesus, when you die, you’ll keep on living–with Him!

ROUND TWO: A REVEALING QUESTION

After taking round one, Jesus goes on the offensive and asks His own question in verse 41: Then Jesus said to them, “How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms, “the Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool at your feet.’ David calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?” Jesus was quoting from Psalm 110.

We’ll only touch on this briefly. The term “Son of David” was one of the most popular titles for the Messiah. In Jericho, Blind Bartimaeus called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” As Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem, the crowd cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Matt. 21:9) King David was revered because he was such a great warrior. He led an army and conquered the Philistines. The Jews expected the Messiah to “follow in his father’s footsteps.” In other words, they expected the Messiah to be a military man like David. But Jesus used David’s own words to express the Messiah is not merely the “son” of David–He is David’s Lord.

Jesus supplied His own answer:

ANSWER: Jesus is greater than a military king–He is Lord!

Jesus not only claimed to be the Messiah, He accepted a designation far more controversial–He claimed to be LORD! Jesus won that round, because the religious leaders couldn’t even answer Him.

ROUND THREE: BEWARE OF SHOW-OFF RELIGION

There’s the bell. Jesus continued His barrage of spiritual punches as He closed in for the knockout. In verse 45 we read: While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, “Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.”

The harshest words Jesus ever spoke were to the Jewish leaders who trusted their religion and rejected Him. The English word “religion” is derived from the Latin word “re” “ligare.” *Ligare* means “to link.” (A “ligament” links bone with muscle.) Religion is man’s effort to “re-link” with God. The problem is there are no rituals or rules you can follow that can connect you with God. Religion is man trying to connect with God–Christianity is God connecting with us.

Karl Marx is often called the father of Communism. At an early age, he professed faith in Christ and was baptized into the Lutheran church in Germany. At that time, the Lutheran church was the state church and had become fat and rich off the taxes they received from the poor people. Marx saw such a discrepancy between the Bible and the organized church that he repudiated his faith. He later wrote: “Religion is the opium of the masses...Through it, the pain people suffer in a world of cruel exploitation is eased by the fantasy of a supernatural world where all sorrows cease.” (*Living Religions*, Mary Patt Fisher, p. 141) You may think it strange, but I agree with Marx–and so did Jesus. People can be “drugged” by religion until they think their rituals and good deeds will get them into heaven. Show off religion is always performed for others to see the good works they do will earn them access into heaven. Jesus said in Matthew 6:1, “Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don’t make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won’t be applauding.” (*The Message*) Here are three symptoms of Show Off Religion:

1. S.O.R. is concerned with outward appearance

Jesus said these religious leaders loved to walk around in flowing robes. They wanted people to notice them. Have you ever gotten dressed for church and wore something because you want other people to notice it? We have our own “flowing robes” today. Religious people take pride in wearing their “Sunday clothes” as part of their worship routine.

My parents grew up during a time when everybody had basically two sets of clothes—regular clothes and “Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes.” My dad was a forester for International Paper Company—he drove a pickup truck and wore khakis and boots to work. The only time he ever wore a tie was to church. But by the time we drove out of the church parking lot, he had pulled it off. He always said we should dress up for church because God deserves our very best. I didn’t argue with him, I just clipped on my little tie every Sunday. But like my dad, I always took it off in the car on the way home.

I grew up thinking it was a religious act to dress up for church. I’ve since learned God *does* deserve our very best—but it has very little to do with our clothes. That’s why we don’t have a dress code here. You can worship just as sincerely in Levis and boots as you can in an Armani suit and Johnston and Murphy shoes! I’m afraid our custom of wearing formal clothing may even be a hindrance to some people who need to follow Jesus. Through the years, I’ve heard too many people say, “I can’t come down to your church because I don’t have nice enough clothes!”

I heard a story one time about a preacher from a Baptist church who visited a family and invited them to church. The family said they didn’t have any nice clothes to wear. So the pastor talked to some of his members and they took up an offering and bought the family some really nice clothes. The next Sunday the family didn’t show up at church. On Monday, the Baptist preacher knocked on their door to ask why they weren’t in church. The husband said, “Well, we got up on Sunday morning and put on those fancy new clothes. And we looked so nice that we decided to go to the Episcopal church instead!”

Jesus was saying inward purity has nothing to do with outward appearance. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. You need to examine your heart and make sure when you are dressing up to come to church you aren’t thinking more about what other people will say about your clothes than about what God will say about your character. Show off Religion is concerned with outward appearances.

2. S.O.R. loves public recognition

Jesus said the religious leaders loved being greeted in the market place and loved sitting at the seats of honor at the banquets. To them, their religion gave them a special status in their community. In the Jewish religious community, there was a very clear “pecking order.” The more important a person was, the more recognition they were given.

There are some Christians who perform their religious acts because they want some kind of recognition. I learned this lesson in a painful way. When I was serving my first church out of seminary, we started sending out a weekly newsletter. After Vacation Bible School one summer I listed the names of some workers who had worked to make it such a success for the kids. I made the mistake of accidentally omitting the name of one lady who had helped with the refreshments. This lady stopped coming to our church and wrote me a vitriolic letter for leaving her name off of the list. I made the shocking discovery that some people want to be recognized for their religious acts—and if they don’t get public recognition, they are gone. That’s show off religion.

3. S.O.R. can hide a sinful heart

Jesus accused these religious leaders of “devouring widow’s homes.” A Jewish rabbi usually didn’t receive any income from teaching, but they could accept “gifts” from people. Well-meaning widows often offered their homes for a rabbi to live in. In many cases the rabbi “took over” and the widow became nothing more than his servant.

C.S. Lewis wrote a book entitled *The Screwtape Letters* in which a young demon named Wormwood was advised by a senior demon named Screwtape. By using this literary style, Lewis was able to express spiritual truths in a unique way. In one part of the book Screwtape delivered a speech to the student demons—it’s like teaching 4th grade boys in Sunday School probably. In the speech, the Screwtape talks about “religion.” He says: (Senior Devil Screwtape in a speech at the Training School for Young Devils): “It will be an ill day for us if what most humans mean by ‘religion’ ever vanishes from the earth. It can still send us the truly delicious sins.” (*The Screwtape Letters*, p. 171)

Jesus completed His verbal salvo by saying the people who practice show off religion will be punished most severely. The sins of these religious men were not the gross sins of the flesh—they were the sins of pride, greed, selfishness, and hostility. These are what may be called “religious sins.”

CONCLUSION

Jesus wins this verbal boxing match by a unanimous decision! As we complete this study, we need to examine again the issue of what happens when a person dies. In the book of Job we find the Big Question: “If a man dies, will he live again?” (Job 14:14) Every culture has some answer to that question. People in every culture on earth must answer this fundamental question, “What will happen to me after I die?” The ancient Egyptians embalmed their leaders with supplies and riches for the next world. The Vikings taught of their fallen warriors going to Valhalla where they would fight all day and drink wine at night from the skulls of their conquered foes. The Muslims teach that the faithful will go to a place of sensual and physical delights. If a man dies, will he live again?

Job answered his own question with the Big Answer: “I know that my Redeemer lives...I myself will see Him with my own eyes.” (Job 19:25-26) We have a redeemer, His name is Jesus. He was crucified, but He rose from the dead. If you have a personal relationship with Him you will see Him one day. Jesus only gave us a few details about life with Him in heaven—we don’t know everything about what it is like. The best thing about heaven will be that Jesus is there—and if you have a relationship with Him *now* then that relationship will only be better in heaven. Now we see but a poor reflection—it’s like we having to squint to see through a fog, but then we’ll see Him face to face. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Archibald Hunter relates the story of an old country doctor who went to visit in the home of a man who was dying. The man asked the doctor to describe to him what heaven would be like—since he would be going there soon. As the doctor thought about his reply, there was a scratching at the bedroom door. The doctor said, “Do you hear that? It’s my dog. I left her downstairs when I came in. She has come up here because she heard my voice. She has no idea what’s on the

other side of the door—but she knows I’m here and that’s all that matters to her. I reckon it’s the same for you. We don’t know everything about what’s on the other side of death’s door—but you can be sure that your Savior is there—and that’s all you really need to know.”

OUTLINE

ROUND ONE: (20:27-40) A RIDICULOUS QUESTION

1. Earthly relationships will be overshadowed

Marriage is a preoccupation here, but not there. Those who are included in the resurrection of the dead will no longer be concerned with marriage. They’ll have better things to think about, if you can believe it. All ecstasies and intimacies then will be with God. *Luke 20:35 The Message*

2. We’ll be God’s children, and we’ll be like the angels

3. We’ll live with the living God

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? *John 1:25-26*

ROUND TWO: (20:41- 44) A REVEALING QUESTION

ANSWER: Jesus is greater than a military king—He is Lord!

ROUND THREE: (20:45-47) BEWARE OF SHOW-OFF RELIGION

Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don’t make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won’t be applauding. *Matthew 6:1 The Message*

1. S.O.R. is concerned with outward appearance

2. S.O.R. loves public recognition

3. S.O.R. can hide a sinful heart



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes