

Doubting that there's an afterlife? Come listen to the Highest Authority!

Luke 20:27-40 (text)

24 November 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am
(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

You might have heard about that period in history called the “Enlightenment” – also known as the “Age of Reason,” which covered most of the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe!

It was at this *Age of Reason*, that many Europeans became “enlightened” modernists, and very skeptic about religion and the Bible! Indeed, at that time, science & reason won the day in many people’s minds/hearts. Man had become “smart” – and when man becomes smart, then why would he have need of God!?

So, many people showed great disbelief in the Bible – also in the idea of an afterlife (life after death), as if science with its rational character cancels out faith – even the Christian faith! “Us moderns – we’ve become too smart to believe in things such as the Bible – and that includes life after death!”

My brother & sister, hear what a theoretical physicist of our day says – yes, Stephen Hawking who rejected the concept of an afterlife!

Says he, "I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark".¹

Wow!

Here’s a scary thought – do you & I also at times doubt in the existence of life after death?

Well, here’s a warning to all who reckon there’s no life after death: Beware! For our text tells us that there is life after death – which means there’s also things like accountability to God, and Judgement Day!

Enlightened modernists! They’re not just in modern times! No, even in Jesus’ days they stuck out their heads – in the shape of the Sadducees!

Well, here’s the main message of our text: *Christian, do you doubt in the existence/reality of life after death? Well, the highest Authority – the very Son of God – assures you & me that the resurrection (with all its consequences) is real!*

Here are the main points of our text:

- Skeptics
- Afterlife Indeed!
- For Whom?

Skeptics

¹ Sample, Ian (15 May 2011). "Stephen Hawking: 'There is no heaven; it's a fairy story'". The Guardian. Retrieved 9 January 2019.

Also cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afterlife#Modern_philosophy

It's only two or three days before our Lord's crucifixion.²

The Jewish leaders hate Him!

They're badly keen to find fault with Him – to find any grounds on which they could take Him to court and get rid of Him!

They have already tried to catch Him out on two previous occasions: when they tried to make Him admit that He is God's very own Son;³ and when they tried to make Him say something against paying tax to the Roman government! But, both times, He answered them with such divine skill that they had no grounds on which to take Him into custody! Now they come with another clever scheme! Yes, *before*, they sent Pharisees, Law-Teachers and Herodians to try & trick Him, but *now* they send another group – the Sadducees!

Who were the Sadducees?

Well, they were Jewish religious leaders whose theology differed greatly from that of the Pharisees!

The Sadducees had a low regard for all OT books except the Pentateuch (first five books).

What's more, they did not believe in things supernatural – not in the existence of angels and not in life after death – when you die, you simply cease to exist!⁴

What radical belief for *Jews*; yes, for *people of God* – especially for Jews of 2,000 years ago – long before the Age of Reason!!

² Either still the Tuesday, or the Wednesday before His death (on the Friday). (cf. Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.900)).

³ That His ministry happened by the authority of God!

⁴ For the Sadducees' views, cf. Josephus *Jewish Wars* 2.8.14 §§163–65, "But then as to the two other orders at first mentioned, the Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skilful in the exact explication of their laws, and introduce the first sect. These ascribe all to fate [or providence], and to God, and yet allow, that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men; although fate does co-operate in every action. They say that all souls are incorruptible, but that the souls of good men only are removed into other bodies, but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment. But the Sadducees are those that compose the second order, and take away fate entirely, and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil; and they say, that to act what is good, or what is evil, is at men's own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to everyone, that they may act as they please. They also take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades. Moreover, the Pharisees are friendly to one another, and are for the exercise of concord, and regard for the public; but the behaviour of the Sadducees one towards another is in some degree wild, and their conversation with those that are of their own party is as barbarous as if they were strangers to them. And this is what I had to say concerning the philosophic sects among the Jews."

Also cf. Josephus' *Antiquities* 13.10.6, "What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses: and for that reason it is, that the Sadducees reject them: and say, that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word; but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our fore-fathers. And concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them. While the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich; and have not the populace obsequious to them: but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side.⁴² But about these two sects, and that of the Essenes, I have treated accurately in the second book of Jewish affairs."

Also cf. Josephus' *Antiquities* 18.1.4, "But the doctrine of the Sadducees is this; that souls die with the bodies. Nor do they regard the observation of anything besides what the law enjoins them. For they think it an instance of virtue to dispute with those teachers of philosophy whom they frequent. But this doctrine is received but by a few: yet by those still of the greatest dignity. But they are able to do almost nothing of themselves. For when they become magistrates; as they are unwillingly and by force sometimes obliged to be; they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees: because the multitude would not otherwise bear them."

Well, these Sadducees – these people who don't believe in life after death – now come with the express purpose to lampoon (ridicule) Jesus; to see if they could make a fool out of Him, and even trap Him into saying something that would upset their rivals, the Pharisees!

So, they ask Jesus a question – an absurd question re life after death.

Yes, our text tells us how these Sadducees now come and “spin out” a fabricated story for Jesus. It's the made-up⁵ story of a woman whose husband died before she could bear him a child. So, according to the Jewish levirate-marriage rules, her husband's brother who is first in line should now marry her with a view of having children with her, but children who would then be regarded as offspring of her *deceased* husband – children who would, in other words, have the legal right to inherit the deceased man's estate (his house, his land, and his possessions). Indeed, by this levirate-marriage practice, the deceased's line and his estate would be protected/secured!⁶ But what makes this made-up story so ridiculous is that this woman had *seven* husbands in a row, and with none of these did she have any children. These husbands all died, one after the other. Then she also died! And here comes the ill-willed question from the *Sadducees* who did *not believe in the resurrection*: “Come on, Jesus (sarcastically!!), tell us: In the resurrection (in life after death), whose wife will this woman be? For she had seven husbands.”⁷

Well, I'm sure if you & I were there, we would have seen the self-wise smirks on the faces of these Sadducees as they questioned Jesus!

Question: How did these Sadducees ever come to disbelieve the resurrection (life after death)?

How did they come to a disbelief in the spiritual world – the world of angels and of the souls of deceased believers? After all, is not *God* also Spirit?

Besides, were these Sadducees not part of God's covenant people who knew the Scriptures?

Did they not know Ps 16:10, “...*You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay*”?⁸

Did they not know Dan 12:2, “*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*”?⁹

⁵ For the possibility that this was a deliberately made-up story, cf. Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.905).

⁶ Cf. Gn 38:8; Dt 25:5; Ruth 4:1-12

⁷ Lk 20:33 “*In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.*” (ESV)

⁸ For Peter's interpretation of this verse, cf. Acts 2:24-31, “*God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. 25 For David says concerning him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. 27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence. 29 “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.”*”

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Da 12:2). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

What about Job 19:25-27, “*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*”¹⁰

Yes, how did these Sadducees (who were of God’s people) – how did they ever come to the conclusion that there’s no life after death?

Here’s the answer: By the same way in which all other like-minded people have come to the same conclusion – by self-wise pride; by thinking they’re smart; yes, by thinking they “know it all” – by thinking they “have arrived!”

Is this not what also happened in the Age of Reason (or so-called “Enlightenment”) of the 17th and 18th centuries?¹¹

You see, it was at that time that mankind saw great scientific discoveries – especially regarding how the universe is made up. Yes, the discoveries made by men like Copernicus,¹² Johann Kepler,¹³ Galileo Galilei,¹⁴ and Isaac Newton¹⁵ drove some people to reject religion as superstition!

Alexander Pope,¹⁶ and English poet, critic and satirist at the time, described man’s arrogance well, when he said, “Nature and Nature’s laws lay hid in the night; God said, ‘Let Newton be!’ and all was light.”¹⁷

The same happened with the Sadducees of our text – just in a slightly different way. You see, it was not modern discoveries/inventions which drove the Sadducees to arrogance, but it was their high status in society. After all, under the Roman government, these Sadducees became wealthy,¹⁸ which made them feel so secure! Besides, they claimed that they had their origins in a priest of the times of *important King David* of old

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Job 19:25–27). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

For more Old-Testament verses on the resurrection, cf. e.g. Job 14:14; Ps 17:15; Ps 73:24-26; Is 26:19; Ezek 37:1-14; Hos 6:2; Hos 13:14.

¹¹ From 1648 until 1789 A.D.

¹² (1473-1543): the sun, not the earth, is the centre of our universe

¹³ (1571-1630): the sun emits a magnetic force that moves planets in their courses

¹⁴ (1564-1642): made a telescope and proved that the acceleration of falling bodies is constant

¹⁵ (1642-1727): he studied the motion of bodies in the heavens and he presented the universe as one great machine operating according to unalterable laws. In 1687 Newton published his *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in which all laws of motion, in the heavens and on the earth were harmonized in a master principle for the universe – the law of gravitation.

¹⁶ Alexander Pope (21 May 1688 – 30 May 1744) is regarded as one of the greatest English poets, and the foremost poet of the early eighteenth century. He is best known for his satirical and discursive poetry—including *The Rape of the Lock*, *The Dunciad*, and *An Essay on Criticism*—as well as for his translation of Homer. After Shakespeare, Pope is the second-most quoted writer in the English language, as per *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, some of his verses having even become popular idioms in common parlance (e.g., *Damning with faint praise*). He is considered a master of the heroic couplet.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Pope

¹⁷ For this cf. Shelley, B. 1995. *Church History in Plain Language*. Dallas, TX : Word Books. p.314

¹⁸ “They reacted strongly against the oral Torah of the Pharisees and were theologically conservative in their commitment to the Torah alone, yet they were very pragmatic in their relations with Rome, *possibly because of their high social status*” (Bock, D. L. (1994). [Luke](#) (Lk 20:27–41). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. *Emphasis mine*).

– a priest by the name of Zadok.¹⁹ Thus, through pride, they became self-wise know-alls who had a high regard only for the first five books of the OT, which they even interpreted on their terms – not God’s! And their terms were based on rationalism, which had very little room for the supernatural.²⁰

Yes, like the modernists of the Age of Reason (and of our times), these Sadducees were committed materialists dedicated to live only for the good things of this life!²¹

How about you & me?

I mean, we’re sinful, too!

Do you/I sometimes doubt that there’s life after death?

You may remember that agnostic friend of mine of whom I have often spoken – the one who, in his mid-sixties (after a lifetime of churchgoing) denied Christ! Well, he, too, came to reject the idea of life after death! Said he: “Pieter, we will all just be zipped when we die!”

You see, it’s convenient: If there’s no life after death, then, after my life on earth, I won’t be held accountable by God, for I won’t even exist! Neither would I then have to fear a day of Judgement, for such a day would then never come! Scary self-wise thinking of know-alls!

Take again the words of Stephen Hawking as he rejected the concept of an afterlife: "I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark".²²

What silly reasoning by a man of reason!

I mean, did Hawking not know that man is not just body, but also soul!? Did he not understand that the body may well die – and its brainwaves may indeed stop – and the body may indeed be laid in the grave, but that (as Eccl 12:7 says), “... *the spirit returns to God who gave it*”?²³ Besides, is the natural man then so ignorant (short-sighted) that he cannot understand that the Creator of the universe is able to even raise the dead – soul & body (as Heb 11:19 says)?²⁴

How shocking that some people have gone so up in their study of the natural sciences that they dare to say, “I believe in science, not in God!”

¹⁹ **ZADOK** (Heb. *šāḏōq* ‘righteous’?). 1. Son of Ahitub, who was, according to 1 Ch. 6:1ff., 50ff., a descendant of Eleazar, third son of Aaron. He was priest at David’s court along with Abiathar (2 Sa. 8:17) and had charge of the ark (2 Sa. 15:24f.); he took part in the anointing of Solomon as David’s successor when Abiathar supported Adonijah (1 Ki. 1:7ff.). He and his descendants discharged the chief-priestly duties in Solomon’s Temple until its destruction in 587 BC (Bruce, F. F. (1996). [Zadok](#). In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 1261). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).

²⁰ Cf. “As a priestly aristocrat movement, they accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as carrying supreme authority and disliked the oral tradition of the Pharisees. *They tended to be rationalistic and were by and large wealthy*” (Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke](#) (pp. 517–522). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. *Emphasis mine*).

²¹ My adaptation of the words of Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke](#) (pp. 517–522). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

²² Sample, Ian (15 May 2011). "Stephen Hawking: 'There is no heaven; it's a fairy story'". *The Guardian*. Retrieved 9 January 2019.

Also cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afterlife#Modern_philosophy

²³ Eccl 12:7, “...*and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*”

²⁴ Heb 11:19 “*He* (i.e. Abraham) *considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*”

And so, my brother & sister, if there's anyone here who fools himself by saying, "There's no life after death," then beware, you will be caught painfully off-side when our Lord returns!

On the other hand, if there's someone here who, in a moment of weakness, doubts that he/she will live after this life – yes, if there is anyone of us here who is scared and thinks by him/herself, "When I die, will I still live?" – let such person hear God's Word today – and then believe it! Don't be a skeptic; don't be a modernist; don't go haywire with the little bit of human knowledge & status & wealth that you have, and think you know it all! Don't think in arrogance that what you (and modern science) know (be these ever so impressive) is all there is to know about the physical and the unseen world, or about the Almighty Creator, or about life after death. You see, we must be careful that we do not become so arrogant because of what we have (man has) achieved, that we despise that which we do not yet know and have not yet seen/tasted first hand!

Well, so far re the very long point 1: "Skeptics."
Here is a shorter point 2...

Afterlife Indeed!

The Sadducees' question was ridiculous!

Yet, our Lord nevertheless answers it!

And He makes it plain that there *is* an afterlife – there *is* a resurrection of the dead; yes, of God's loved ones to eternal life.

But, in life after death, nobody will marry or get married! And the reason our Lord gives is: because nobody in heaven will ever die.

You ask, "What does dying have to do with getting married?"

Well, in this life, people die! And so, because people die, children have to be born to populate the earth! And for children to be born, people have to marry!

But, in heaven, there won't be the need for children to be born, for the population of heaven will never shrink, because no one in heaven will ever die!

Therefore, there is no need for people in heaven to get married!

Logic answer!

But now Jesus goes further. And He gives another "dig" at the Sadducees!

(Remember, the Sadducees did not believe in the existence of angels)

So, now our Lord tells them that in heaven people don't die, because they are like the *angels*.

Sadducees, do you get it? Enlightened modernists, do you get it? There's not just life after death; yes, not only is there a spiritual sphere, but there's even *angels*!

In what way will we one day be like angels? Well, at least in the sense that angels do not eat, neither do they get married!

My brother & sister, is your marriage here on earth good? Husbands, do you really love your wives and care for them? Wives, do you really love and respect your husband? Yes, is your marriage a happy & blessed one? And are you now disappointed that you will not get/be married in heaven?

Well, remember this: heaven will give you even better relationships than what you have had on earth, otherwise why did Paul say, "*For me, ... to die is gain!*" (Phil 1:21)?²⁵

²⁵ Phil 1:21, *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

Indeed, as RC Sproul says, "...maybe, when we get into heaven, the joy that we have experienced as a married couple will be exceeded by our relationship with every other believer in the kingdom of God."²⁶

Why does Sproul have a "maybe" about the way we will be/live in heaven? Well, because God's Word does not give us all the detail – why John says (in 1 Jn 3:2), "***Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him...***"²⁷

Sadducees, modernists, doubters, wake up! There is a resurrection of the dead! There is life after death! Man's *soul* is immortal – but so is his *body*; that same body whose brainwaves God is able to get going again! After all, does not God's Word teach us that, at the end of the age, even our *bodies* will be raised²⁸ and reunited with our souls that have all the time been with God²⁹ in heaven?

Well, Jesus now goes further! You see, these Sadducees regarded the first five books of the Old Testament (Pentateuch) higher than the rest of Scripture.

So, what does our Lord now do?

Well, He could have given them any other part of the Old Testament which refers to the resurrection of the dead (there are many such passages),³⁰ but look what He does instead! He now goes to this very same Pentateuch (the only part of Scripture which the Sadducees regarded as God-inspired), and points out to them something they have obviously never seen!

Yes, Jesus now refers them to Exodus 3:2-6, which describes God's appearance to Moses – yes, when Moses saw the burning bush which was not affected by the flames. From this burning bush, this is what God said to Moses: "***I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.***"³¹

In other words, what God was saying to Moses is: "Moses, here when you meet Me at this burning bush, it is now 400 years after the death of Jacob – and even more than 400 years after the deaths of Abraham and Isaac." "Yet, even so – even though all three of them have long-gone died, I *am* (I am *still*) their God!"

My brother & sister, that's why Jesus now says (in v.38 of our text) that *God is not God of the dead, but of the living!* In other words, what God (according to Christ) was saying to Moses was: "Moses, I *am* the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of

²⁶ Cf. Sproul, RC's audio sermon at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/resurrection-davids-son/>

²⁷ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (1 Jn 3:2). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

²⁸ Cf. 1 Thess 4:15-17, "***For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.***"

²⁹ Cf. Eccl. 12:7, At death "...***the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it***" (Emphasis mine).

³⁰ Cf. e.g. fn. 10 above

³¹ Cf. Lk 20:37 citing Ex 3:6 which reads, "***Then he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.'***"

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם
אֱלֹהֵי אִשְׁכְּנָז וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב

Yes, being who He is (the Son of God), Jesus here exploits an absent verb (the verb "is") in the Old Testament passage. (On this, cf. also Bock, D. L. (1994). [Luke](#) (Lk 20:27–41). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).

Jacob.” “I am (present tense) still their God, for they’re alive and well here with Me in heaven!”

See, Sadducees? Here Jesus has proven to you – and that from the only part of Scripture which you trust, yet a part which you have not interpreted on God’s terms but on your own – that there *is* indeed life after death; that the resurrection of the dead is real!

My brother & sister, look! What happens now?

Well, now even Christ’s opponents – the scribes (Law-Teachers) – acknowledge (v.39): “**Teacher, You have spoken well.**”

And so conclusive was Jesus answer that verse 40 says, “...**they no longer dared to ask Him any question!**”

My brother & sister, let’s stop here for a moment! Do you realise that the answer the Sadducees got that day, was an answer which came from the Highest Authority!? It came from One who knows – from the very Son of God!

And so, you & I can take great comfort: this Word is true! There is a resurrection of the dead! Yes, what our Lord once said to Martha (in Jn 11:25-26) is trustworthy, “**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die...**”³²

And you know what?

These words received their power when, only five days after the event of our text, Jesus Himself rose from the dead – He **the firstfruits of the resurrection!**³³

Did these Sadducees become aware of our Lord’s resurrection? I mean it happened only about five days after the event described in our text!

We don’t know!

But *you & I* have heard this good news!

Question: What have you & I done with this news?

You see, what you do with this news is vitally important – which brings us to the last very short point in the sermon...

For Whom?

For whom is this resurrection? – I’m not talking of the resurrection to eternal damnation, but the resurrection to eternal life.

Well, in v.35 Christ tells the Sadducees and all of us: Resurrection to life is for *those who are considered worthy to attain it!*

Who are they?

Well, they are the ones who do not worry about whether they would be married in heaven or not, but about whether they are *children of God!*³⁴

They are the ones who, by God’s grace, receive Jesus Christ the Son of God as their Saviour and Lord!

Is that you?

AMEN (3,003 words excluding footnotes)

³² [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 11:25–26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³³ Cf. 1 Cor 15:20, “**But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**”

³⁴ Cf. Lk 20:36b “...**They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.**”