

# DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD?

*SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST*

by Ron Ritchie

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Last month Anne Marie and I were staying in Nice with a dear French couple who are retired. One day we all took a day trip from Nice to a small village called Bordighera on the Italian Riviera. Our goal was to find the grave of George MacDonald. To explain that I need to take you back five years earlier when Anne Marie and I were in Scotland. On that trip we had visited Huntly, the home of the late George MacDonald (1824-1905), who was an incredible character Anne Marie had discovered. As many of you know, in his day he was a famous Christian pastor, novelist, poet, and Victorian visionary. He and his wife Louisa raised twelve children, and during those years he became friends with Lewis Carrol, author of *Alice in Wonderland*. MacDonald's daughter Mary posed as Alice in the illustrations in all the earlier editions of the book. MacDonald is also credited with being C. S. Lewis' mentor.

In Huntly we visited MacDonald's home and the castle he played in as a child. At the Huntly library Anne Marie was given a box of his original manuscripts to read. On our final rainy day in Huntly we went to a few local graveyards hoping to find his grave, but to no avail. A few days later we visited John Thins bookstore in Edinburgh and found a new MacDonald biography by William Raeper that informed us that ill health had forced MacDonald and some of his adult children to move to the Italian Riviera. Louisa died in Italy in 1902, and and, within three years, at the age of eighty-one George MacDonald died in his sleep while visiting his family in England. His ashes were carried to Italy and placed in the grave of his wife, next to the graves of his two favorite daughters Grace and Lilia, in the cemetery at Bordighera.

Our trip last month from Nice to Bordighera was designed to close the chapter on our adventure in Scotland. After we found the ancient cemetery, eventually we discovered the weed-covered graves of the MacDonald family. The four of us cleaned up the grave sites, and then as we looked down on their tombs I gathered us together in a circle, and holding hands, we thanked God for the life that he had given George MacDonald and his family on this earth during their generation. I thanked God that "...according to His great mercy [He] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

This in turn fills our hearts with the hope that we will one day not only see our Lord Jesus face to face, but will also spend eternity with George MacDonald and his family, C. S. Lewis, and all the saints in all the ages who have passed into eternity before us. Our French friends have a Catholic background, but we are not sure exactly where they are in relationship to Jesus Christ and whether they believe in the resurrection of the righteous from the dead. I do know that they were very much moved by that whole experience. For myself, as I stood there I realized once again that when we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are born again to a living hope because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and our ultimate destination is not a graveyard. That was not where George MacDonald was! It was only his remains that were there as a memorial to the glory of God and how he worked through George his whole life, and as a reminder to us of how God uses us and then moves us from this world right into his presence.

I know that you have met many religious people who are not sure that there is a resurrection from the grave. Many of them hope that it will be like the after-death experience so many have testified they had, that floating sensation in which they seem to have physically died, their soul is drawn toward a great white light, they see family and friends, they feel warm and safe, and they don't want to go back to earth. One of the problems with calling that experience the resurrection is that it is all heaven and no hell for everyone; no one is held accountable for their lives or their sins, and in the final reality no one needs the saving grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ.

In Luke 20:27-47 Luke introduces to us a group of religious leaders in Israel called the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. As we study this passage together, this would be a good time for all of us to ask ourselves, "Do we really believe in the resurrection from the dead?" Let's read Luke 20:27-33:

**Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife, and he is childless, his brother should take the wife and raise up offspring to his brother. Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died childless; and the second and the third took her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. Finally the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife."**

On Palm Sunday our Lord had ridden into Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey and presented himself to the nation of Israel as their Prince of Peace and their Messiah, only to be rejected by the spiritual leaders. On Monday he had cleansed the temple of commercialism, saying, "It is written, 'And My house shall be a house of prayer' [Isaiah 56:7], but you have made it a robbers' den." This amazing event was followed by a day of teaching, preaching, and healing. Now it is Tuesday in this account, his final day of public teaching, which was filled with hope for the believers and warning for the unbelievers.

The spiritual leadership of the Jewish people was divided into two camps: One camp was the Pharisees, theologically the rigorous realists who were hoping that by keeping the letter of the law they could obtain salvation, the immortality of their souls after their physical death. Politically they were bitterly opposed to the existing Roman rule over their nation and lives. The other camp was the Sadducees, theologically acknowledging only the written law of Moses as binding and rejecting the entire traditional interpretation and further development of the law. At times they submitted to the prophets but not to any of the oral tradition. They refused to believe in angels, spirits, a resurrection of the body, retribution in a future existence, or any personal continuity of the individual after death, because they did not believe that Moses spoke of the resurrection of the dead (see Acts 23:1-10). Politically the Sadducees were the aristocrats, seeking to move among the rich and powerful, especially within the political parties of the Roman government.

The Sadducees knew that Jesus taught his followers about the resurrection, especially since he had raised his friend Lazarus from the dead...! They knew they had a problem in Lazarus, but first they wanted to discredit Jesus' view of the resurrection and his teachings and thus damage his authority among the common people. So they came up with a hypothetical question: "Jesus, for the sake of argument, knowing we do not believe in the resurrection, how would you solve the following problem?"

"(1) The law: We all know that Moses wrote, "...if a man's brother dies, having a wife, and he is childless, his brother should take the wife and raise up offspring to his brother" [see Deuteronomy 25:5-10]. In Deuteronomy, the law read that the childless widow should not seek a new husband outside the family, but one of her husband's unmarried brothers should go to her and take her to himself as his wife, with the hope that a son would be born who would retain the name of his deceased father, so (a) it would not be blotted out from Israel (Deuteronomy 25:6); that is, it would be kept in the covenant of Abraham so future generations would be blessed (see Genesis 17:7-9); and (b) so his estate would stay within the family.

"(2) The problem: There were seven brothers all living together in a family unit as the law stipulates in Deuteronomy 25:5. And the first brother married a woman and died childless so that there was the threat that his name would not be carried into the next generation. And the second unmarried brother was willing to marry his sister-in-law and hoped to have a son to keep his brother's name for the next generation, but he died childless. And each in their turn married this sister-in-law, and each in turn died childless. Finally the woman also died.

"(3) The question: In the resurrection, which one's wife would the woman be? For the seven had her as wife. According to our logic, if we believed in life after death, once she arrived in heaven she would be the wife of all seven brothers. Therefore the law of Moses would be promoting in the future life what it condemns in this present

life. Such a conclusion would be absurd, so you can see why we do not believe in the resurrection from the dead!"

It is human nature, actually, to wonder about this issue; there are many people who have been married more than once because their first spouse died, and so they aren't sure who they will be married to in heaven. But the hypothetical question posed by the unbelieving Sadducees had some problems that are shared by the Mormon doctrine of the resurrection of faithful Mormons and the Islamic theology of eternal life. The Mormons believe that the faithful die and then are resurrected to the third or celestial heaven, where they are given possession of a kingdom for themselves and their family. As a god, each man, with his family, will rule and populate a separate planet of his own. The Koran teaches that the faithful within Islam will enter a heaven filled with worldly delights. But according to Jesus, the Sadducees, the Mormons, and the Moslems are all wrong about the resurrection from the dead.

Do you believe in the resurrection from the dead? The Sadducees did not, but Jesus did. Let's read what Jesus taught in Luke 20:34-40:

**And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him." And some of the scribes answered and said, "Teacher, You have spoken well." For they did not have courage to question Him any longer about anything.**

Before we go on in this passage we need to turn to a harmony of the gospels and see that Matthew, in commenting on this story, added an important spiritual truth that will help us understand our Lord's confidence in confronting these Sadducees. Matthew 22:29: "But Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God.'" Jesus was saying, "Your narrow, humanist conclusion is void of all the truth about the resurrection found in the word of God. And your logic has blinded you to the power of God as revealed in nature and in the lives of the men and women who have lived before you, for God can do what man cannot do."

Even if all we want to find in the Jewish Scriptures is the mere mention of bringing life out of death, the vision of Ezekiel 37 vividly shows God's power to bring people back from the dead, and if he can do that he can give them eternal life in another age as well. The prophet was told to look on the valley of dry bones, and the Lord asked him if he thought the bones could live again. The prophet wisely replied, "O Lord GOD, [only] Thou knowest." Then Ezekiel was to prophecy over the whole house of Israel: "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have...caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land.'" Jesus was telling the Sadducees, "Your basic problem is that you do not know what the living God knows and what he can do. And your concept of living in eternity has too much worldliness in it."

Then Jesus explained the difference between this age and the next. First, the sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. The gift of marriage was established by God for men and women in this age in order for us to understand through our physical, emotional, and spiritual oneness his loyal love and oneness with us. Marriage in this fallen age was also designed by God for couples to bring forth children in order to preserve the human race. This will continue as long as this age lasts-until Jesus brings all his enemies under his foot, the final enemy being death itself. We won't need to have children anymore when death is conquered.

"...but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage...." Jesus has pulled back the curtain of eternity, and we are suddenly given either some wonderful words of hope or some terrible words of warning, depending on our relationship with Jesus. The first

thing we see is that there is life in two different ages, "this age" or our present experience, and "that age," a future experience beyond our present physical life in this fallen world. The second thing we see is that only those who are considered worthy get into "that age."

Now, we have already seen in the parable of Luke 16:19-31 that everyone who has ever been born is given an eternal existence; the issue is where we spend that eternal existence. Those who reject the revealed truth of God as spoken through his prophets and in these last days through his Son Jesus Christ will spend eternity in lonely torment, as did the former rich man in the parable. Those who place their faith in God and his Son are declared righteous in the sight of God and thus are considered worthy. They will spend eternity in fellowship with God the Father, his Son, and all the saints from every generation as did the former beggar in the parable, Lazarus.

The latter is what was spoken of by Jesus when he referred to "that age and the resurrection from the dead." Our Lord was not addressing the resurrection of judgment of all people from every generation in which they must stand before the great white throne of Revelation 20:11-13. He was addressing the resurrection of life for the righteous. Jesus had said, "...an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). And later Jesus had said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

Then our Lord pointed out three important spiritual realities for those who are considered worthy by God to spend their eternity in his presence. First, there will be no need for the marriage bond in "that age." The popular idea was that the resurrection would restore men and women to their former bodies, appetites, passions, and the usual material conditions and relationships. Jesus immediately challenged that concept by saying that the first thing that will be different in the resurrection of life for the righteous is that the need to be married and produce children will no longer exist.

Now, Anne Marie and I have been married for thirty-six years, and I have to confess I don't know how I would function without her, we are so much one flesh. So it makes me feel a little strange to think of not being married to her in "that age." But we also know that we will experience the oneness we now feel with our beloved husband or wife with Christ himself as members of his bride, the church. Revelation 19:7-9 says, "'Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.' And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints....'blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" I admit I don't know how that is going to work. It's amazing, isn't it? There will be intimacy, oneness, commitment, and loyal love between Jesus Christ and his church. So we do get a sense of marriage, but it's on a different level.

Jesus also explained that in "that age" there will be no fear of death: "...for neither can they die any more." George MacDonald experienced the great pain in this age of watching many of his twelve children, his wife, and even some of his grandchildren die. Jesus said that in that age there will be no more such pain. John wrote in Revelation 21:1-4 that in the "new heaven and new earth...[God] shall dwell among [men]...and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

For in "that age" the righteous will be like angels. They will not become angels but will be like angels in that they will have resurrected bodies fit for eternal living without the fear of death and without the need for marriage and the perpetuation of the race. Angels are wonderful spiritual servants of God, with intellect, emotion, and wills. They are given great powers and responsibilities over nations and individuals for blessings and punishment. We know that all of them were created and given the opportunity to live out their eternal life serving God or the freedom to rebel against him. We know that some chose to love him and some chose to rebel against him with eternal consequences.

We know that somehow the angels created before the foundation of the earth experienced maleness and

femaleness even before Adam and Eve did, for all the angels who have appeared on this earth to converse with mankind are described as male: Lucifer, Michael, and Gabriel; and the angel of the Lord, the preincarnate Son of God, is described in the male gender (see Genesis 18). There is an interesting verse in Zechariah 5:9 that seems to suggest that some spiritual beings are female, for Zechariah said while he was talking to a male angel, "Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and there two women were coming out with the wind in their wings; and they had wings like the wings of a stork...." It is difficult to say whether these two women were good or evil spiritual beings, but at least we see both male and female genders mentioned in the spiritual world, which means there is expression of sexuality.

On earth God designed our sexuality to be expressed in a variety of righteous ways between men and women within a family unit, within the church family, and in our public relationships. Our sexuality is greatly enjoyed and blessed by God within the intimacy of a marriage relationship. Many theologians have suggested that the sexual intimacy we now experience with our husband or wife within a faithful marriage relationship will be experienced with all the saints in eternity, but we do not know at this time the form it will take.

Finally, Jesus explained our relationship to God as sons (and daughters): "...and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." John wrote: "...as many as received Him [Jesus the Son of God], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name; who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

Jesus went on to give proof for the resurrection of the righteous in verse 37. "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Remember that the Sadducees prided themselves on their understanding of the five books of Moses and could not find therein any reference to the resurrection from the dead. But our Lord answered the Sadducees from the writings of Moses by bringing to their attention Exodus 3 and the story of the burning bush. It was here that God appeared to Moses and told him that he was "I AM WHO I AM" (see Exodus 3:14). "And God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.'" (Exodus 3:15.)

Now, at the time that Moses met God in 1441 BC, Abraham (2161-1986 BC) had lived some five hundred years earlier; he "...breathed his last and died in a ripe old age [one hundred seventy-five], an old man and satisfied with life...his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave..." (in Hebron) (Genesis 25:8-9). Isaac (1950-1881 BC), the second son of Abraham, born when Abraham was one hundred years old and the miracle child of his barren and aged wife Sarah, and born as the seed of promise to Abraham, died at the age of one hundred eighty, and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him in Hebron (Genesis 35:27-29). Jacob (2001-1852 BC), born as the second son of Isaac, purchased the birthright of promise from his older brother Esau, lived to be one hundred forty-seven years old, and then after blessing his twelve sons, "he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people" (Genesis 49:33).

Now the Lord rebuked the Sadducees' theology: "Look, right in front of you, in the second of only five books of Moses where you have spent all your lives, is the truth of the resurrection of the saints. When Moses met God he was told that he was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now, he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him. And you need to know that although five hundred years of earth time passed between the deaths of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the life of Moses, the moment these spiritual fathers died on earth they immediately went into the presence of God the Father. When God appeared to Moses he spoke of the personal presence of these men with him in eternity.

If you spend very much time in European graveyards, you know that many of them are very well kept. Their grave stones are clean, and many have fresh flowers placed on them by family and friends. Several have a favorite photograph of the deceased embedded in the stone with the hope of keeping the person alive in the hearts of the visitors. After we had cleaned up the grave sites of the MacDonalds, though, I looked around at the hundreds of other grave sites in this Italian cemetery and wondered how many of those people had been resurrected from the

dead because they had placed their faith in their risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ while they were living in "this age," resulting in the gift of eternal life-they are alive right now!-in "that age" with all the other saints.

After our Lord challenged the Sadducees on their faulty resurrection theology, he took on the Pharisees concerning their understanding of Psalm 110. In that psalm he would show them that the Messiah they were expecting was not only to come from the loins of David as a man, but he would be God-Man and would have the power to offer mankind salvation as well as the hope of the resurrection from the dead. Do you believe in the resurrection from the dead? The Sadducees did not, but Jesus did because he is the eternal God-Man. Let's read Luke 20:41-47:

**And He said to them, "How is it that they say the Christ is David's son? For David himself says in the book of Psalms,**

**'The Lord said to my Lord,  
"Sit at My right hand,  
Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet."  
David therefore calls Him 'Lord,' and how is He his son?**

**And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation."**

In the context of the people's crying out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," Jesus asked the Pharisees a question about the meaning of Psalm 110, which David had written by the power of the Holy Spirit about a thousand years earlier. Verses 1-2:

**The LORD says to My Lord,  
Sit at My right hand,  
Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.**

From that psalm, Jesus asked, "How is it that they say the Christ [Messiah] is David's son?" Everyone agreed that Messiah would come from the physical line of David, and thus he was called the son of David, testifying to his humanity. But Messiah had to be more than just a son, because David called Messiah "my Lord," which gave testimony to his deity. He would not only be an earthly King, but a divine Savior. So Jesus questioned the Pharisees again: "If David called Messiah 'my Lord,' how can he be his son?" He was saying, "You understand that I am from David's lineage. How come David, who is supposed to be my father, turns to Jehovah God and calls Messiah, 'My Lord'?" And what Jesus did in one stroke was to show the Pharisees they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God, either. Messiah was to come as God-Man, fully God and fully human.

The Pharisees were between a rock and a hard place: They knew that Jesus and the people were proclaiming him as the long-promised Messiah. They knew that if they said David was calling Messiah his Lord because he was God, then they could not object to the claim of Jesus, the son of David according to the flesh, to be the Son of God, and they should all fall down before him and worship him. So the Pharisees refused to answer. But we know that this is the mystery of the incarnation. Ray Stedman wrote in his commentary on Mark 8-16, *The Ruler Who Serves*, "[Jesus] is descended from David according to the flesh, but he is the Lord of Glory according to the Spirit." Our Lord, the God-Man, looking forward to his own resurrection, understood the promise of his Father that after his Ascension and glory he would be seated at the right hand of the Father, and all his enemies would become a footstool at his feet.

Finally, our Lord warned his disciples about the hypocritical scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. He was saying, "When they teach the law correctly listen and obey, even though you must not walk in their hypocritical lifestyles.

But at this moment the Sadducees are wrong in their view of the resurrection, and the Pharisees are wrong in their view of the Messiah, looking only for the human seed of David and not God in the flesh."

Do you believe in the resurrection from the dead? Down through the ages many religious men and women in the spirit of the Sadducees have not placed their faith in God and his resurrected Son Jesus Christ, and they have not believed what God had already spoken concerning the purpose of life in "this age" and in "that age" to come. So they are left to dream up their own ideas about whether there is life after physical death or not. Those who have ultimately rejected the revealed truth of God are now suffering the terrible eternal consequences of being separated from God, his Son and the sons of God forever.

But Peter gave hope to the hearts of all those who have placed their faith in God and his Son Jesus when he wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." (1 Peter 1:3). Because Jesus has been raised from the grave by his Father and now lives, all we who love him will be resurrected from the dead in "this age" and placed into "that age" so we can be with him and all the saints including George MacDonald. MacDonald understood this spiritual reality clearly when he wrote, "We must remember that we are only in a sort of passing vision here. And that the real life lies beyond us...." That life is found in Jesus Christ, mankind's only hope for a personal resurrection and the gift of eternal life.

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