

Luke 20:27-40

Are We Sadducees?

Jesus is the Messiah and we want to listen to Him well. But Luke is warning us that it is possible to be very religious and still be missing the point entirely.

The Setup: Two Ways of Doing Religion (Luke 19-20)

Luke shows us Jesus teaching in the temple and surrounds that teaching with a series of stories about religious leaders who aren't actually listening to Him.

These aren't random controversies. Rather, Luke is deliberately showing us what these leaders are getting wrong and why. This is important for us because we are here to listen to Jesus too, and we don't want to make the same mistakes.

It starts with Jesus cleansing the temple. He explains that there are two very different approaches to religion:

- **The right approach** — genuinely meeting with God
- **The wrong approach** — using religion as a cover to get what you actually want, while looking religious on the outside. Jesus calls this making God's house a "den of robbers."

These two approaches can look similar from the outside. The danger is that **self-deception is real**. These religious leaders wouldn't have said that's what they were doing. Perhaps many didn't even know. That's what makes it so serious — and so worth examining in our own lives.

The Warning Signs: What Getting It Wrong Looks Like (Luke 20:1-26)

Luke gives us several illustrations of the wrong approach in action:

- 1. They avoided dealing honestly with Jesus (Authority question, 20:1-8)** When Jesus confronted them, instead of repenting they dug in and challenged Him. They weren't really interested in what was true — just in protecting their system and their position. They didn't factor the possibility of God actually working in this world into the way they went about their religious activity.
- 2. They wanted to be in control (Vineyard parable, 20:9-18)** Jesus exposes the heart of the problem. They are at the center of their religious activity, not God. That's ultimately why they hate Jesus — He shows up and tells them this isn't about them.
- 3. They were controlled by what people thought (Tax question, 20:19-26)** Because they weren't factoring God in, they ended up living for human approval instead. This made them sneaky — questions became traps, there was always a hidden angle, you could never trust what someone said at face value. Jesus cuts through it by refocusing them on what actually matters: *give to God what is God's*.

The Sadducees: A Deeper Problem (Luke 20:27-40)

By the time we get to the Sadducees we are expecting another wrong response to Jesus. But this one goes deeper than the others. It reveals something foundational.

Who were the Sadducees? They were a religious group who did not believe in a future bodily resurrection of the dead. They thought this life is all there is — once you're dead, you're done. Interestingly, they were still very religious people. Which raises the question: what were they doing if they didn't believe in that? The answer is that they were using religion to make their lives work right now — the community, the influence, the stability. That temptation is still very much alive today.

The question we need to ask: *Are we closet Sadducees?* Do we really believe in the resurrection of the dead — not just as a line in a doctrinal statement, but as something that actually shapes how we live?

What the Sadducees brought to Jesus: They presented a theological challenge using a law from Moses about something called Levirate marriage. Their point was to make the resurrection seem logically absurd: if she married all seven, whose wife is she in the resurrection?

Jesus' Answer: There Are Two Ages

Jesus responds by showing that their question rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of what the resurrection actually is.

Their mistake: They were imagining the next life as just a continuation of this one — taking all the concerns and problems of this age and then assuming the next age will be exactly the same.

What Jesus actually says: There are two ages — this one and the one to come — and they are genuinely, radically different.

This Age	The Resurrection Age
People die	Death is impossible
Marriage and children are important	No marriage needed
Inheritance laws matter	Inheritance is eternal
Sons of this age	Sons of the resurrection

The resurrection age is not a step down from this life. It is a step up — a totally new kind of existence. We just can't fully conceive of it yet.

Why this matters for everyday life: Jesus teaches throughout the Gospels that the reality of the resurrection is what fuels the Christian life. Take it out and what He says in Scripture stops making sense:

- *Why keep doing right when it's costly and you get little credit?* Because there is a resurrection where every act of faithful obedience will be rewarded.
- *Why fight against sin when it seems desirable?* Because there is a resurrection — and a heaven and a hell.
- *Why not lose heart as your body gets older and weaker?* Because you are looking past the time your body goes into the ground to the time it comes back out.

The Deepest Issue: What You Believe About God

Underneath the Sadducees' misunderstanding of the resurrection is an even deeper problem — a misunderstanding of the character of God.

Jesus takes them to Exodus 3 — the burning bush. This might seem like a surprising place to go to prove the resurrection. But Exodus is the book of the Bible specifically designed to show us who God is and how He saves His people.

At the burning bush God says to Moses: *"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."*

Notice: This is a present tense relationship even though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been dead for hundreds of years.

He is presently their God and we know He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Therefore, if He is their God, they must live to Him.

But if they are alive, why do they have to rise from the dead? God had made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — including a promise about land — that had not yet been fulfilled when they died. If they remain dead forever, those promises fail. But God is not the kind of God who breaks His promises. Therefore they must rise. Their souls must be reunited with their resurrected bodies so that God can give them what He said He would give them.

The resurrection isn't then just a nice idea. It is possible because of the nature of God, and required because of the faithfulness of God.

The Real Problem Then For the Sadducees

They didn't ultimately believe God was the kind of God who steps into this world, makes promises, and keeps them. So their religion ended up being all about them. They were happy to give Caesar what is Caesar's — but not God what is God's.

How about you?

- Do you believe in the resurrection of the dead — not just as a doctrine but as a reality that shapes how you actually live?
- Are you reading your Bible and coming to church like someone who believes this life is not all there is?
- Are you factoring God in — the kind of God who made promises and is actively working in this world to keep them?
- When you hear Jesus speak through His Word, will you actually submit to what He says? Or will you do what the scribes did at the end of the passage — compliment Jesus politely and then continue doing what you want?

The fundamental question underneath all of these is simply: what do you actually believe about who God is?