

**The Sadducees** were the bitter opponents of the Pharisees who “denied the resurrection of the dead or life after death, the existence of angels or demons, the validity of...all the OT except the Pentateuch [the first five books of the Bible, written by Moses], and divine providence” (Stine, 501). They were an ultra-conservative, high-priestly party, which consisted of "aristocratic, ...worldly-minded "men who were "very ready to co-operate with the Romans, which...enabled them to maintain their privileged position" (Morris, 290).

They would have been delighted to hear Jesus say, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s...” Not only had Jesus humiliated their theological and religious opponents in public, but he had also seemingly validated their approach to religious advancement—friendship with the world's rulers.

It is possible that they approach him with their immediate question, not so much to humiliate and trap Jesus, but in hopes that he will validate their position in a key theological debate with their bitter enemies, the Pharisees. The Sadducees denied that there was a resurrection from the dead (or an afterlife) since the doctrine is seemingly absent (or at least not well developed) in the books of Moses. The Pharisees held to the now common Jewish belief in a future resurrection of the dead.

**The question about the resurrection** that the Sadducees present him with is obviously pre-planned and well-structured. It is based on the principle of Levirate marriage. Moses taught that if a man died without any children, then his closest male relative who was eligible for marriage should marry her and raise up offspring in his name so that his name and inheritance would not be lost. The hypothetical situation sees a woman who marries and survives seven brothers but with no offspring. They ask whose wife she will be in the resurrection. The situation is rather ridiculous, and they hope the argument from absurdity will demonstrate how absurd the idea of a resurrection is. If Jesus is unable to answer the question, he will have become their pawn, proving the validity of their position (and further humiliating the Pharisees) before all the people. Jesus will not be caught in their trap. And in his answer, we find our first point:

**Point 1 — Those whom God deems worthy will live forever and receive resurrection from the dead.** In **verses 34-36**, by demonstrating that the Sadducees' error—they fail to understand the difference between "this age" and "that age." "This age" refers to the age in which they lived, and we live, the present age which has existed since the creation. "That age" refers to the future age, the arrival of the Kingdom of God in all its fullness. The Sadducees misunderstand the nature of the two ages (though they deny the second), believing that if there were a resurrection, then things would continue essentially the same as life now, including marriage. Jesus states that "the sons of this age marry and are given in marriage." In creation, God established marriage, and it has continued ever since. But, Jesus says, **"those who are considered worthy to attain to that age [an age beyond the present one] and to the resurrection from the dead..."** Let's pause there and note: **Jesus affirms a new age which will include resurrection from the dead.** Furthermore, **this new age and the resurrection will be attained by those God deems worthy.** We'll return in a bit to the question of who is worthy to attain entrance to that age and resurrection from the dead.

Jesus says that those who attain these **“neither marry nor are given in marriage.”** When our present age ceases, so does marriage as we know it. Why? **“...for [because] they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.”** Here is Jesus’ logic: receiving an eternal resurrection (a full second birth) makes one God’s son. If you are God’s sons in an eternal resurrection, then you are also “equal to angels”—meaning, you’re eternal and cannot die. If the new age is populated by God’s children who cannot die, then marriage is no longer a necessity, since populating the earth is not needed. **The institution of marriage is no longer needed because death is no longer an issue.**

After stating that marriage is confined to this age and will not exist in the next, Jesus moves on to prove the resurrection of the dead. Since the Sadducees essentially accepted only the books of Moses as authoritative, Jesus points them to a passage not only from Moses' writing but from his life—“the passage about the [burning] bush,” Moses' calling in Exodus. There, Moses calls the Lord “the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” Though all three were dead and buried, the Lord does not state that he *was* their God but *is* (at present) their God. He cannot be the God of people who have ceased to exist—because **“he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.”** Therefore, Jesus reasons, they must continue to exist—he validates that there is life after death. And, it would seem to follow that if God created man with a body that a spiritual life after death, though good, would not be good enough. If the death of the body is a result of sin, and if God is our Savior from the curse, it follows that he would save fully—with the resurrection of the body.

To this answer, **“some of the scribes answered, ‘Teacher, you have spoken well.’”** This does not mean the Sadducees, beaten at their own game, confessed his wisdom. It is likely these Scribes are Pharisees, who can now applaud Jesus for humiliating their enemies and affirming their theology. Regardless, his enemies are now silenced, **“for they no longer dared to ask him any question.”**

But Jesus is not silenced, and he now steps to the plate to ask his own question of the scribes, in which we find our second point.

**Point 2 (20:41-44) — Jesus Christ is God—and through him, God will reign, saving his people and crushing his enemies.** Jesus asks them, **“How can they say that the Christ is David’s son?”** The Christ (or Messiah) was God's Promised One, the Anointed One whom God would send to deliver God's people and reign over them forever. God had promised King David that one of his offspring would sit on his throne and reign over a kingdom without end. Therefore, it was commonly accepted that the Messiah would be “David's son,” a human descendant of David. Jesus asks how this can be—not because he is denying it, but because he is (rhetorically) challenging them to think of the Christ as something *more* than a human son.

He quotes Psalm 110, pointing out that **“David himself says..., ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’”** That last half is enthronement language—the language of a King being given his throne. The Lord (Yahweh) invites this one (the Messiah) to sit at his right until he is given the fullness of his reign, complete rule over his enemies. Jesus asks (and does not answer) this question—**“David thus calls him [the Messiah] Lord, so how is he his son?”** Normally, the descendant would call his father “Lord.” So, how could he be David's son if David acknowledges him as his superior?

The two uses of “Lord” are important there. In Psalm 110, the first “Lord” is the word “Yahweh”—the personal, covenant name of Israel’s God. The second “Lord” is “Adonai,” a name often used as a substitute for saying “God.” So, essentially David says that Yahweh is inviting God to sit at his right hand until his enemies are fully crushed.

Jesus is not denying that the Messiah (himself) is a fully human being and physical descendent of David. He is highlighting that he is something more than a “greater David” or a merely human King. The only way this passage makes sense is if the Christ is fully God and fully man—God coming to reign in the flesh.

And, of course, this is what we confess of Jesus—he is God incarnate, Immanuel, “God with us.” And here is the major implication of this passage for Jesus’ listeners, including us today: **Jesus Christ is God—and through him, God will reign, saving his people and crushing his enemies.**

We read Psalm 110 in its fullness in our call to worship. Notice what is promised of Jesus by the Father in that text: **he will reign.** And that reign separates all of humanity into two camps. The first is those who “will volunteer on [his] day of battle.” When the Christ appears to reign, his people will “volunteer” to fight with him. That is, they will say, “We’re all in! We turn over our lives to you entirely, staking our very existence upon your victory!” The second is those who will not join him; they will be crushed, judged, and heaped up as a pile of corpses.

So, this chapter that began with Israel’s leaders challenging Jesus’ authority culminates in Jesus’ asserting his divine authority to reign—a reign which threatens and condemns those who will not trust him with their present and future life.

**We can pause here for a question of application: What do you make of Jesus? How do you respond to him?** Earlier Jesus spoke of “those who are considered worthy to attain to that age [of the Kingdom] and to the resurrection from the dead.” Psalm 110 (and what follows in our text) make clear the difference between the “worthy” and the “unworthy.” The “worthy” are those who accept Jesus’ authority, gladly and willingly entrusting him with their very lives. The “unworthy” are those who challenge Jesus’ authority, seeking to gain a standing and life in this world by their own devices.

Which are you? **Do you volunteer to die and live with him? Do you trust him with your life?** Do you believe that he has conquered sin and death, dying for your sins and being raised from the dead? Will you, by faith in him, volunteer to let your lot be one with his?

**Or are you among those who rebel against him?** Is your affiliation with Jesus only one of convenience, piety, and religion offering you a means of advancing yourself and gaining a standing for yourself in this world? Will you be among those judged and crushed by him, to be tossed into a pile of corpses?

### **Point 3 (20:45-47) — The unworthy cannot fool God; they will be condemned.**

Jesus follows this with a warning—**“Beware of the scribes!”**

The scribes, which included both Pharisees and Sadducees were essentially hypocrites who used the Jewish religion, piety, and the name of Yahweh as a means of worshiping and promoting themselves.

They liked **“to walk around in long robes,”** designing and wearing wardrobes that would impress their friends and others in the temple.

They “**loved greetings in the marketplace.**” They were not concerned with practicing true hospitality (the love of stranger), nor with welcoming the Gentile who sought Yahweh, nor protecting the widow and orphan, nor with making sure the disabled were assisted and cared for. Rather, they were concerned with making sure they rubbed shoulders with the

They loved “**the best seats in the synagogues.**” For them, attending church was not about hearing the word of God and encouraging others in the faith; it was about being seen and affirmed as someone important.

They loved “**the places of honor at feasts.**” Meals were not about true hospitality (love of strangers) or celebration of what God had done—it was about being seen and affirmed as someone important.

“**For a pretense they make long prayers.**” They could pray impressive, carefully written, and edited prayers, prayers in public. But these prayers were not for the sake of honoring God or requesting his help and assistance. They were for the sake of the reaction of the people—so that people would say, “Oh, look at how he prays!” God damns all such prayers and those who pray them.

In the midst of their religious show, Jesus’ tucks this especially sad indictment: “**[they] devour widows’ houses.**” It is thought that the scribes, because of their piety and standing among God’s people, were entrusted with the care of widow’s estates when a widow had no other family to protect her. A “widow indeed” represented the most vulnerable and easily oppressed and marginalized of all people in Jewish society. The scribes, entrusted with their care, used what little wealth these widows had on themselves (perhaps to buy their robes, their seats, and their status) and left the widows with nothing at all. How opposite Jesus, who at the hour of his death, cares and provides for his widowed mother.

**What is pure religion, true piety, devotion to the Lord?** It is not walking around in religious garb, loving honor amongst our religious community and the world. Rather, “religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (Jas. 1:27). **Why is that?** Because our God is not a God of fancy garb, greetings, and seating. He is a God who humbles himself to dwell with the lowly, to take up their cause, and to rescue them from certain death. That is the story of the Bible and redemption; that is the revelation of God. **So, there is something especially wicked about those who use the name of God to gain themselves a standing among their peers, all while oppressing and taking advantage of the weakest and most vulnerable.**

**Where do we see this today?** We could cite many examples, but let me draw out one that has been in the news of late—sexual abuse within the church, either committed by or covered-up by those who serve in the church. Those who serve in the church—whether as volunteer ministry leaders or as ordained officers of the church—have a special entrustment from God and his people to represent God in how they serve people. The church and those who serve in it are seen and trusted as *safe*. After all, they serve in the name of Jesus, who sees and protects the least of these.

So, when vulnerable people—children, teens looking for affirmation, suffering women (and men)—are manipulated, exploited, seduced, abused, and devoured by those who claim to serve in the name of Jesus, something especially demonic, depraved, and damnable is happening.

This is why Jesus says, **“They will receive the *greater* condemnation.”** There is judgment coming for God’s enemies—and the judgment will be proportionate to the crime. There is greater (and lesser) condemnation. And the *greater* condemnation is reserved for those who actively exploit, abuse, and destroy the weak and vulnerable—and do so while posing as especially holy people of God.

There is an especially hot place in hell reserved for the husband who goes to Bible study and waxes eloquent about Trinitarian doctrine, manhood and womanhood, and the intricacies of the two natures of Christ, only to go home and rape his wife or molest his children.

There is an especially hot place in hell for the pastor who can passionately explain and defend Calvinism, gospel-centeredness, complementarianism, and the glory of God in all things—but, out of fear of what it will mean for his ministry, reputation, and the financial well-being of his church, turns a blind eye to concerns about sexual abuse of children and youth by leaders in his congregation.

There is an especially hot place in hell for the woman who wears her Sunday best, who models godly womanhood externally, and serves on a hundred committees, only to seduce her neighbor or the oppressed woman taking refuge in her home.

If you are an abuser or an abuse-enabler sitting in this church this morning or listening to this sermon online, I want you to hear this loud and clear: **God sees you, and he will act. You will not escape his condemnation—and that condemnation will be great indeed. Repent and flee to Christ.**

Likewise, if you are one who is being abused (or has been abused), particularly by one who claims the name of Jesus, I want you to hear this: **God sees you, and he will act.** Trust him; cry out to him; plead with him to act. (And I want you to know this too: we want to see you. You don’t have to suffer this abuse in secret. Our church is full of godly men and women who will help you. We will listen. We will believe you. We will help you find a safe place. We will help you report. Tell someone. And if they don’t listen and respond, tell someone else. Tell me. Keeping speaking until you are heard and helped.)

**God sees the poor who hope in him.** That is demonstrated in our last point.

#### **Point 4 (21:1-4) — The worthy are those who put their life in the hands of God.**

After saying this, Jesus looked up and saw people putting their gifts in the offering boxes located around the temple. The rich were putting in their gifts, perhaps with great fanfare, in order to be respected (and gain influence) for the financial size of their offering.

Then Jesus notices a “poor widow”—one we learn has only two small copper coins to live on. If this is all she has to live on, it implies she has no sons or family to care for her. This is it. And she puts these coins (an offering so small that it would not pay for fifteen minutes of labor in that day) into the offering box.

Jesus says that she has contributed more than the wealth, even though financially her offering is smaller. Why? Because the rich risked nothing. Sure, they “sacrificed” present and future luxury, but they did not risk their livelihood. That is, they did not trust God with their very lives.

But this woman, by giving everything that she has, gives even what is not in her hands—that is, she offers her future, her well-being, her life. She is, like those who volunteer for the Messiah’s army, is saying, “I entrust you, Lord, with all that I am and all that I will be. I trust you

to provide for me and to be my portion." That is what it means to be "worthy" of the age to come, of the resurrection. To be worthy is to look to God, to believe his promises, to rest in his works, and say, "I turn from every other source of life and trust you alone."

That's what we do in the Lord's Supper—and that is why only those who trust in Jesus are "worthy" of eating and drink this meal. This meal is a physical expression of faith. It is to say, "You, Lord, are my portion and my lot. I believe that you have dealt with my sin and removed it forever. I believe that you have secured my resurrection from the dead. I turn from all else to trust in you. I am all in with you, Christ."

If that is you this morning, if you have confessed your faith through baptism and joined the church (the army of the Messiah), then eat and drink with us this morning.

If you do not trust Christ, then let these elements pass you by. Only look at them. Look at these symbols of a crucified body and remember that you will be crushed, a corpse in a pile when Jesus returns to reign. Why would you die? Repent and believe today.