

Imagine new Earth! Luke 20:27-38

²⁷ There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection,

²⁸ and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. ³⁰ And the second ³¹ and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. ³² Afterward the woman also died.

³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife."

³⁴ And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, ³⁵ but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, ³⁶ for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

³⁷ But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him."

This is an interesting conversation that Luke has written down. Really interesting. The only place where Jesus conversation with Sadducees is described. But what a conversation! There is one theme which this conversation highlights and we'll try to meditate upon it at least a little bit.

The theme is about the resurrection. About the resurrection of the body and the live eternal, about new heaven and new earth. Quite familiar topic, but this discussion can help us to rethink what we believe about the resurrection of the body, is it important for us today or not, and why?

Let's take a look at what Luke wrote. We don't know much about the Sadducees. Few things we know are that they belonged to the upper level of Jewish society, that they believed only books of Moses have divine authority, that they rejected teaching on a resurrection and that they considered it a virtue – to argue with teachers.

Here Luke comes with all of this. The Sadducees are arguing with Jesus on the basis of the books of Moses about the resurrection. When they came to Jesus with their question, it was obvious that they didn't come looking for Jesus' answer. The way they shaped their question was ridiculous. They portrayed impossible scenario to

mock the reality of the resurrection. They thought that by posing this kind of question they can corner Jesus and win the argument. At least in the eyes of listeners.

Sadducees were referring to one of Mosaic laws about levirate marriage. What was this law? It stated that if one of brothers dies and leaves his wife without children, then another brother needs to take her as his wife so that she can have children and his brother has descendants.

For us it sounds strange and difficult to imagine, why would someone give such a law. But when we realize what the culture looked like at that time, it makes much more sense. Women didn't have the same equality as we enjoy it today, nor they had social welfare systems – all of this is a contribution of Christianity to the world.

Ancient Near East was a very patriarchal environment. If woman was left without husband and children she would struggle a lot. Especially towards the end of her life, it would be very difficult for her to survive. That's why orphans and widows were considered the most vulnerable members of society, and that's why laws of Moses protected them the most.

The Sadducees used this law, providing ridiculous case study of seven brothers and one woman, to discredit Jesus and the reality of the resurrection. They thought that if only they can show how ridiculous it looks, that will be enough to prove their position.

This kind of dishonest rhetoric isn't uncommon today. This is a way enemies of Christ argue against the Gospel. Picking something, twisting and distorting it, then presenting it as Christian teaching and ridiculing it.

It isn't uncommon even in churches. When there are people, who confused by surrounding culture, just want to push their own agenda, they quite often come up with similar radical illustrations trying to discredit Biblical truth. We can see it in discussion about life issues, marriage issues, gender issues.

Then it is important to ask, what authorities are being followed, the Word of God or a surrounding culture? Does someone try to twist the meaning of Scriptures as Sadducees did in their argument, trying to support their own preconceived position, or one is truly looking for the wisdom of God.

If only we could learn from Jesus how to answer all these difficult questions! This time again, Jesus is not trying to respond to their tricky question, but addresses the very essence of what is being argued about – the resurrection.

We can't over-emphasize the importance of this question. The message about the resurrection is at the very heart of the Gospel. At the same time this very message is rejected the most.

Many outside of the Church would agree that there are good things in the Bible. Some good and useful principles. They are happy to quote them. But when it comes to the resurrection of the dead... how can you believe this? How can any reasonable and educated person in the 21st century believe this?

May be people two millennia ago believed this kind of fairy tales, but not we, not we who are so smart and know everything. They couldn't be more mistaken in their assumptions about the people two millennia ago.

One of examples we can read today. The Sadducees. They tried to be faithful followers of Moses. They could accept many things, but ... no, not the resurrection. Who would believe it? Isn't that ridiculous?

At Jesus time reigning worldviews throughout the Roman empire perceived the flesh as something lower and the spirit/soul as something higher. Salvation or resurrection, or eternal life was thought about only in categories of escaping from this material reality into a spiritual realm.

We can see it from this argument, we can see from the apostle Paul's discussions in Athens that the resurrection of the dead was something so much contrary to reigning worldviews, that no one wanted... no one would believe it.

That's not all. Look at Jesus disciples. At those closest to Him. How many times He said that He has to go to Jerusalem, to suffer, to die and then... after three days He will raise again. How many times did He say it? Did His disciples listen to Him?

They probably listened, but they didn't get it. For it was so much against their everyday experience. That's what we see – when someone is dead, they are dead. Period. No one comes back from the dead.

That's why the Sadducees so bravely attacked Jesus. Replying Jesus said two things. One, that the resurrection of the dead is a clear message of the Scriptures, of the Word of God. Today we can see that it is, indeed, clear message of both - the Old and the New Testament. Second, that they, that is, the Sadducees, (and often also we) have no idea about God's power and what the life after resurrection will look like.

There were many places in the Old Testament which foresaw the resurrection of the dead, but arguing with the Sadducees Jesus decided to use the same books which they believe to be true words of God.

Jesus pointed that the way God spoke about the people who were dead long time ago, His servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was like they was still alive. For they are alive in God. True God is not God of the dead, but of the living. All His faithful live in Him.

Then Jesus rebuked them saying that they had no idea about God's power and about what the life after the resurrection will look like. They were just using this world's analogies to think about the life to come. They couldn't image that it will be something much, much more glorious.

Instead of it, Jesus said that the life of those, who are considered worthy to have it, will be like... not exactly, but like that of angels. For they cannot die, meaning, we will live forever, we will be Sons of God.

Marriage and also the laws of Moses protecting the vulnerable belong to this life, however, the life to come after the resurrection will be much, much more superior.

Let me ask you this? How often we talk and think about the resurrection? In fact, we every Sunday confess that we believe "the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting." How important is it for us?

Is it just a statement, similarly as apostles heard Jesus saying about His resurrection, but not really paying any attention. Or do we really believe it and it has implications to our lives? Which one of these? I guess, we are somewhere in between.

We so often neglect the hope of the resurrection. We try to be faithful doing what God expects us to do... and then we think that He will show as favour.

The Sadducees tried to be very good people, and they hoped that God will reward them in this life. Apostle Paul, writing about Jesus resurrection said: “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (1Co 15:19)

Why? Because Jesus didn't come to fix this world. He didn't come to help us establish paradise in the midst of the sin and death, violence, sufferings and injustice.

We can read how much He tried to hide when He actually healed someone, or helped them. ‘Just don't tell anyone!’ They didn't listen. They ran around telling what a good doctor Jesus was. And thousands and thousands came to get some benefits for them. They didn't grasp the purpose of God becoming man.

Jesus, the Son of God, came to open us doors to eternal life. To reveal what God has prepared for those who want to be with Him. “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined... God has prepared for those who love him.” (1Co 2:9)

Jesus, true God, didn't come to put some patches on His broken creation. He came to bring total restoration. To bring forth new heaven and new earth. New heaven and new earth! Without sin, without death, without suffering, without pain, violence, injustice. With endless joy, pleasures, happiness, feast in the presence of God Himself.

The best moments of our lives and just glimpses of the future glory. Think about the best that has happened in your life! How long can we rejoice? How long can we be overwhelmed by happiness? How long we can overflow with gratitude for God has accepted us and poured over us His overwhelming love?

Few minutes, few hours? But now, take these the most wonderful and enriching moments of our life and try to imagine that they are just shades of the future glory, when you, resurrected in a new body, will feast in the presence of holy God, with endless joy.

The apostle Paul exclaimed: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Rom 8:18) Not worthy even comparing...

Imagine! Spend more time imagining it! We spend our lives imagining what bad can happen, worrying, being anxious. Imagine the glory which Jesus has prepared for you! For you.

Imagine yourself the best you potentially could be, physically, intellectually, playing, laughing, working, resting, rejoicing on new earth with new heaven.

So what does the resurrection mean for us today? Everything! If we don't have the resurrection of the dead, then why would we bother to serve others, to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others? Why? It would be meaningless.

Why wouldn't we spend every minute and every cent trying to get the most out of this life? For ourselves. Why would we talk to our neighbours trying to bring them to the knowledge of truth, to the knowledge of Jesus?

If there is no resurrection, then we don't need God, we just need His help to make this life better. That's it. That's all. And for many it probably is the case.

But the core message of the Gospel, the message of Jesus, the message of the Bible, the message of the apostles is – we believe for we have seen it! The resurrection is true. That's where we are heading. That's what God has prepared for us. We don't deserve it. We can't merit it. We can but accept this incredible gift with gratitude and joy.

When we believe it, we can't keep silent. For God wants everyone to inherit this place. Entrance is for free. No merits required. Just desire to be there. When we believe it, only then we can truly serve others, even our enemies. Not looking for our benefits, for we know that our reward is great on this new earth.

Jesus knew it, the apostles knew it, and multitudes of saints knew it. You know what they did with their lives? They devoted them to bring the Gospel to others. Even the death wasn't obstacle for them. When you know what awaits you, nothing can stop you serving others and bringing them Good News of God's victory.

This is where we are. This is what Jesus has prepared for you. Imagine! Rejoice! We are God's heirs. New earth is ours. Just imagine and let this joy change our lives.

Amen.