

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Luke 20:27-40

Year C - Proper 27, Text: Luke 20:27-40

Year C - Proper 27, Text: Luke 20:27-38

The Concept of an Afterlife — Before Jesus

The passage being surveyed focuses on the issues of the resurrection of the body and life after death. In the Jewish world of Jesus' day, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the body or life after death. Their sacred scriptures consisted of the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). These writings make no reference to the resurrection of the body and life after death.

However, the Pharisees *did* believe in the resurrection of the body and life after death. Their sacred scriptures consisted of all those books that Christians refer to as the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures: the Law (Genesis–Deuteronomy), the Prophets (Joshua–2 Kings, Isaiah–Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea–Malachi), and the Writings (all other Old Testament books).

When Jesus appeared on the scene, He had many things to say about the resurrection of the body and life after death.

Verses 20:27-33: On one occasion, the Sadducees confronted Jesus with a question related to the resurrection of the body and life after death (Luke 22:27). When doing this, they told a story about seven brothers marrying the same woman — in sequence, one after the other after each brother (husband) died. They then asked Jesus which of the seven brothers would have the right to claim the woman as his wife in the life to come (which they did not believe in)?

Verses 20:34-36: Jesus responded by declaring that in the life to come, there would be no marriage or giving in marriage. Furthermore, those who are raised from the dead would never die again (Luke 20:36–37). They could not die again because they would be like angels and children of God, being children of the resurrection.

Verses 20:37-40: Jesus then referred to Moses speaking of God as the father of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to God they are alive (Luke 20:38). The future resurrection of the dead is a reality for One who exists beyond space and time! There would have been no point in referring to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob if the patriarchs were nothing more than dead corpses. Jesus' words echo in what Paul says in Romans 14:7-9:

None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

This is not a denial of actual, physical death — which even Christ himself suffered. But it is rather a statement of trust in God that the Lord does not abandon his people to the grave, and it is He alone that has the power to grant eternal life.

Life Now and Life to Come

In today's Western world, a decreasing number of people believe in the God revealed in the Bible or life after death. However, when people become senior citizens, they are more willing to give thought to what might take place after they die. Those who come to faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord begin to experience a sense of hope and peace.

However, there is more to the Christian faith than merely believing that we are forgiven and will "go to heaven." Jesus calls us not just to believe in Him as forgiving Savior, but also to follow Him as servant Lord. Matthew 25 contains three profound messages in which Jesus calls us:

- to live expectantly (25:1–13);
- to live responsibly (25:14–30); and
- to live compassionately (25:31–46).

The truth embedded in John 3:16 is profound. Those

who believe in Jesus will not perish but have everlasting life. However, those who believe in Jesus are to seek to live now (in this life and world) as they shall then (in the world to come). After all, they are already citizens of God's eternal kingdom.

God's people in this world are to bear in mind that Jesus never linked "being blessed" to what they supposedly possess in this life. Jesus linked it only to devoting one's life to serving Him in all His "distressing disguises" (to borrow a phrase from Mother Theresa); see Matthew 25:31–36. Jesus' brothers and sisters are to understand that there are only two people on Planet Earth, "Jesus and me." Everyone other than me is the Jesus I am called to serve.

In this regard, Romans 6:1–14 is worthy of much thought. Paul states that when we are baptized, we are declared to be sharers in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. We are not to look upon death as punishment for sin; Jesus took care of that issue for us. When we die, we bid farewell to this world and enter the eternal world to come.

When William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, was dying, he pleaded (only half-consciously), "O, I wish you would let me go — I want to go home." His son Bramwell told him that he was there, in his home in Hadley Wood, lying on his own bed. Booth listened, and then exclaimed, "But that is not home!" Heaven is home to the person who loves God, and to love God is heaven.

When Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor who was hated by Hitler, was being led naked to the gallows where he was to be hanged, he declared, "Today life begins!"