

*Fourth Sunday of Easter*  
*April 21, 2024*  
*With Him Forever*  
*Acts 4:1-12*

I love old colonial period movies that talk about the great adventurers going out into the jungles of Southeast Asia, paving a path across the plains of the Serengeti, and navigating the wilds of the mountains of North America. And I especially love the ones where they first encounter the native peoples. I love how they come to appreciate the cultures they encounter and learn from them and even adopt their ways.

But I also have noticed over the years that there is an ominous tone in the movies that show the progress of the western world looming on the horizon. Greedy unethical capitalists push the western governments to use their armies to clear cut the native cultures out of their way so they can make a profit to send home, enriching themselves but doing little to help the land they conquered.

Any student of history knows this has happened in some parts of the world and has clearly not happened at all in other parts of the world. Some westerners did an excellent job of merging with the culture, enriching the culture, and leaving it better off than it was economically with full charge of their land given to the people native to the land.

But the movies forget that part. Even so, I still love the emboldened adventurer who anticipates the problem and confronts the invaders with reasonable solutions, but is usually met with disdain, because, as the invaders would describe it, our emboldened adventurer, “HAS GONE NATIVE”.

As soon as that phrase comes out of their mouths you know the adventurer no longer has an opinion, the adventurer no longer understands the importance of their roots, the adventurer can be dismissed out of hand, and even steamrolled over like the natives he has become a part of and is trying to defend.

And that’s where my favorite movies take a somber tone. “You can’t stop the inevitability of progress,” they say. And we all know what happens to the native people and the adventurer at that point. They are either lost to history or disappear further into the wilds never to be seen again.

Today, I would suggest to you that the Sadducees have gone native. They are soon to disappear into the ether, and the inevitability of the progress of the Gospel is falling upon the world as the former false narrative fights to stay alive!

The Sadducees have always been fascinating to me. And they are fascinating to me because they do not believe in *the resurrection of the dead*, nor any afterlife at all. And I simply cannot wrap my head around that knowing what I do about the Old Testament.

I look at all my beloved heroes of the Old Testament and cannot believe anyone would suggest they would not rise from the dead to be with us on Judgement Day.

No Abraham? No Jacob?

No Moses? No David? No Isaiah?

I mean, even Job tells us, "...after my skin has thus been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold."

"Life after death is undeniably prominent in these verses. Three times Job confidently asserts; I shall see God. Mention of 'flesh,' 'eyes,' and 'kidneys' shows that Job thinks of his future, vindicated in bodily terms."

(FC Ep I 10)

So, there is no way the Sadducees should think this way. But they have clearly articulated a theology that has no hope for the afterlife at all. They have joined the native pagans of the world that believed there is no life after death, and never will be, so eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die! AND THAT'S IT!

They were YOLO before any of us knew that anacronym meant 'you only live once'!

So like so many without God today, they articulated a theology that memorialized their good works now, because there was nothing to work with after they were dead. Build your statues, memorialize your buildings, adorn your plaques in the community centers for all to see, because life is short and then you die.

So of course, the Sadducees are not comfortable with all this resurrection talk. It could destroy the finality of their human inspired achievement, it could rob them of their rep, it could take all that they achieved and force them to admit that their works are as filthy rags in the eyes of the Lord. So, they rally the captain of the temple and the other priests to confront Peter and John with their resurrection theology exclaiming, "By what power or by what name to you do this?"

And thereby reveal the greatest irony of those who think *what they do matters*.

In the grand scheme of things, it is never about you. It's not about what you do, it's not about what you have done, it's not about what you will ever do. It's hard to understand the failure of this way of thinking. We are so wrapped up in the culture of *what have I done lately* that we don't even know that we don't do anything at all. We are just like fish in water, we don't even know that we are wet.

We adorn our offices with the accolades of what we have accomplished in life with certificates of completion and diplomas of education. The gavels of our presidential citations prove we are accomplished leaders of community organizations. And when we're missing all of that we still have our family heroes' mementoes to prove our DNA has value even after we are gone.

I am sure Peter's critics in today's lesson had them, too, in their first century form: titles of authority, family names that affirmed future generation's power, even robes and stoles to show in which school of thought they were honorable mentions.

But take just a moment to consider one thing, just one thing with me, for a moment. When you consider your heritage, your legacy, where you came from, who was your great, great, great grandmother or grandfather?

Unless your hobby is family genealogy you probably have no clue, nor do you care. But even if you are an astute worshipper of history like I am, even if you do know their name and know what they did...

Outside of the basics, do you know them at all? Did you see how they loved their children and where they sat with them in church? Can you still hear their conversations to this day when they complained about their politicians and the price of bread and eggs? Do you really know what their passion were, how they treated and loved their pets, or even how they treated people who worked for them or how they worked for those above them?

For Peter, the Sadducees criticizing him, were soon to disappear, and we know little about them outside of our Holy Bible. In fact, they were gone almost immediately after the Acts of the Apostles was written for use in the ancient church. For in 70 A.D. the destruction of Jerusalem eradicated them from the face of the earth never to be seen again or remembered.

They are as dead as their understanding of the afterlife is, never to be hear from again.

Is your life tied up in the temporal? Are you sure that all that you have, all that you are and all that you will ever be is summed up in this life? Are you realizing now that you will never be remembered by your great, great, great, great grandchildren just like you don't remember those who came before you?

Peter's message of the resurrection is for you, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ. For just as Jesus rose from the dead, you too will rise from the dead and be remembered forever ever! For you will join with all the saints and all the company of heaven every time we gather around our risen Savior in holy communion as a memorial and actual coming together as the body of Christ in, with, and under the bread and the wine.

Not because of our resurrection, but because He was resurrected from the dead so we, too, by faith, will rise with Him and live with Him forever!

AMEN

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