

Sermon 6 November 2022 'Resurrection.'

Luke 20:27-38

It seems a little strange to be talking about resurrection as we lead into Advent, but I guess it is what it is. Though we are talking about resurrection to a spiritual life, not a physical life! Anyway, this is a very interesting exchange between Jesus and the Sadducees on the issue of resurrection. So firstly, let's have a quick look at just who the Sadducees were.

The Sadducees were a religious faction that wielded great power in nearly every aspect of society except military. They were the Jewish aristocrats of their day, very wealthy and extremely influential, and they hated Jesus. They saw him as a huge threat to their position of privilege.

The interesting thing about the Sadducees is that they did not believe in heaven, hell or resurrection, hence their challenge to Jesus. They believed in the traditional Jewish concept of Sheol for those who had died. So what is Sheol?

Sheol is a place of darkness to which all the dead go, both the righteous and the not so righteous, regardless of the moral choices made in life. It is a place of stillness and darkness cut off from life and separated from God. Job gives us a good idea of the concept of Sheol: *'...before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and utter darkness, to the land of deepest night, of utter darkness and disorder, where even light is like darkness.'* Job 10:21-22. Not much to look forward to!

So the Sadducees put this question of a life after death in the context of seven brothers dying. In Jewish law, if a man dies it is the duty of his brother to marry his widow. In this rather ridiculous scenario as given by the Sadducees, each of the seven brothers die, each having married the widow (I have a degree of sympathy for the widow). Their question to Jesus is, who does she belong to if there is such a thing as resurrection to a new life?

Jesus makes the point that this new life is a spiritual life but they are talking in physical terms. You just cannot apply the same principles. He points out that our physical bodies have perished but our souls live on. He emphasises this by referring to what God said to Moses from the burning bush, *'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'* Exodus 3:5. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have long since died, but their spirits live on with God. And so it is with us. We die but we live on with God in spiritual form.

This concept, this belief in a spiritual life after death is of vital importance to the Christian faith, and it is reasonably complex, mainly because we don't have tangible proof of its reality. But here we have Jesus giving a succinct and easily understandable answer to this question. For me, this response to the Sadducees is so very typical of Jesus and encapsulates his form of teaching, which is straightforward and uncomplicated. William Barclay, renowned Biblical commentator, puts it so very well, *'Jesus used arguments that the people he was arguing with could understand. He talked to them in their own language; he met them on their own ground.'* This is precisely why people, people like you and me, flocked to hear him.

Over the years I have heard a few sermons, probably not as many as you because most of the time I have the task of delivering them. On many occasions I have sat there thinking, 'Not only is some of this passing right over the heads of many sitting here, it is time this person sat down because I am struggling to take all of this in.' And you can be sure that by the next day I will have remembered a fraction of what I heard.

Too often I have read a book expounding the life and teaching of Jesus, or the tenets of our Christian faith, and the language is nothing like the language Jesus would have used. It is almost as if the writers are wanting to make statement about their intellectual or theological prowess. Why do we make it so

complicated? Jesus was concise and to the point. As Barclay said, he used imagery and language that his listeners, people like you and me, could relate to and understand. That is why he was such a brilliant teacher.

Going back to the issue of life after death. There is no doubt that this is something we should be working towards, and there is no doubt that this is something we can look forward to.

There is the story of the sons of John D Rockefeller, who was the co-founder of Standard Oil and extremely wealthy, to say the least. Their father wanted his sons to know what the life of a working man was really all about. To achieve that end, he insisted that they go and labour in the oil fields. For more than two years the Rockefeller boys worked on drilling rigs. They worked long and arduous hour. At the end of each day they were exhausted and they had to endure the unpleasantness that comes from being covered in oil and working in hot conditions.

One day, as they were trading stories over a few glasses of beer with their fellow workers, one of the Rockefellers was asked how he liked being among the common workers and experiencing the arduous working conditions. He responded, 'I love it! This has been one of the best times of my life.'

The man who asked the question said, with an edge of sarcasm to his voice, 'That's because you know you're not staying. You know there is something better out there waiting for you when this is all over. You would look at things differently if you thought that working in these oil fields was all there was for you.'

He had a point! But likewise, if we know there something better to look forward to, then our attitude and approach might be quite different. How we deal with the challenge of this life, how we conduct ourselves in this life, will determine the quality of that next life. If I had to reply in one sentence to the question, 'What is the purpose of life?' my reply would be, 'To prepare for my next life.' Or to put it very very simply, 'To make sure I go upstairs rather than downstairs!'

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:10, '*For we all must stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or the evil we have done in our bodies.*' It's those words I have in mind when I say my purpose in life is to prepare for the next life.

Let me finish with another quote, an anonymous quote: '*When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. May you live your life so that when you die, the world will cry and you will rejoice.*'