

Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question (Luke 20:27)

I sometimes contend, only partly in fun, that all the important things I have learned about faith

- I learned before I was seven years old and I attempt to prove this by quoting Sunday School songs
- Many of which members of my congregations learned in Sunday School too
- Here is one that I know I knew before I ever went to school

*I will make you fishers of men
Fishers of men, fishers of men.
I will make you fishers of men
If you follow me.
If you follow me, if you follow me
I will make you fishers of men
If you follow me.*

However in our Sunday School in Devonport, which in those days had over 120 children

- in a church that less than 25 years later would be closed, I learned a second verse

*Read your Bible pray every day
Pray every day, pray every day.
Read your Bible pray every day
If you want to grow.*

And so it continued ...

Rather childishly, (but it's alright to be childish when you are a child

- you know my Father did not live in the age of political correctness
- or of equality in sports for boys and girls, though he would have approved of it
- he used to say if I moaned when he roughed me up at football - as an eight year old I had concussion
- you are playing like a proper girl, I tried this with my girls who replied, 'but I am a girl Daddy'
- Which left me feeling somewhat confused and I dare not try to rough Michael up now)
- anyway, rather childishly, I used to think that reading the Bible and praying every day
- had something to do with your height – that what you had to do if you wanted to grow
- it was some years later that I realised that it was spiritual growth I had been singing about
- I think it was the great Church of England preacher, John Stott, who said
- 'ignorance is probably the greatest enemy of the Christian faith today' and I think he was right
- We all know that it is a tragedy when a child does not grow up to full maturity
- and the same is true of spiritual growth; the problem has been that in the life of the church
- elongated babyhood has become so common place, we are almost frightened to address the issue

One of the reasons that I offered for Christian Ministry was that God had blessed my conversations with others

- especially in my student days and by my witness others began their own searching and questioning
- and found personal faith in the Lord Jesus for themselves
- Sometimes it was difficult to answer the questions that my young friends asked
- in fairness, faith is not the same as knowing all the answers
- Sometimes I could answer, sometimes I might have to say that I just did not know or promise to find out
- But there were other times when people asked questions not to discover the answer but to catch me out

I AN ATTEMPT TO RIDICULE THE TRUTH

Throughout his ministry Jesus was asked many questions, this incident is part of a series of catch questions

- there is discussion about paying taxes to Caesar, about David's son and then one on marriage
- this question does not appear to be an earnest enquiry after truth – instead after the Pharisees
- the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question about life after death
- their question was an example of *reductio ad absurdum*, going to extraordinary lengths to prove a point

The law of Moses provided that if a man died his brother should marry the widow

- in the ancient world this really was for two reasons
- the first was that someone would need to take responsibility for the woman
- who did not have equal opportunities or privileges in the ancient world
- and the second was that it was thought important that someone carry on the family (*Levirate* marriage)
- Now there was a woman whose husband died, she married each of his brothers in turn
- when all seven brothers had died, she died too, so in heaven whose wife will she be? I can't help myself:
- 'I'm 'Enery the Eighth, I am, 'Enery the Eighth I am, I am / I got married to the widow next door'
- She's been married seven times before / and every one was an 'Enery
- She wouldn't have a Willie nor a Sam / I'm her eighth old man named 'Enery / 'Enery the Eighth, I am!
- It's a bit of a rich question from the Sadducees because they did not believe in the resurrection
- but they thought if a definitive answer was impossible, it showed the impossibility of a resurrection
- but Jesus deals with this attempt to ridicule the truth, head on:

II AN ANSWER TO REAFFIRM THE TRUTH

Jesus begins his answer saying ‘The people of this age marry and are given in marriage.’

- the implication here is that in the age to come marriage is not a feature, a bit painful for devoted couples
- but we have to listen on, those who are considered worthy of taking part in the future age (i.e. heaven)
- will neither marry or be given in marriage – marriage is not part of the resurrected life
- But why would that be because marriage is one of God’s good gifts? (Marriage is given by God, MSB)
- But those who are raised from the dead can no longer die; for they are like the angels
- They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection
- One of the reasons for marriage, in fairness not the only reason, is the continuance of ‘mankind’
- It is unfashionable to say that today but it is nonetheless true, marriage can be blessed with children
- Marriage is not a feature of the resurrection because it is not necessary, people will no longer die
- so preservation is not an issue, the resurrected people are like angels, not mortal, neither male nor female

Now this might sound a bit dismal, for those who have been or are or even would like to be happily married

- we need to remember that heaven is fullness of life in the family of God
- when we were children our relationship with our parents was the most important thing
- as small children we did not feel deprived of being married, that was just not how life worked
- this is how we should think about heaven – as children we anticipated but did not understand growing up
- our lives as children were complete without being married, and the same is true for many adults
- but single or married, the Christian looks forward to a further stage which is heaven
- we are not adults in heaven, for age does not matter, we are not male or female, single or married
- In heavenly relationships those things are no longer important

III AN AFFIRMATION OF REVEALED TRUTH

Now this might be all difficult to absorb, especially if are more familiar with unbiblical teaching

- But it is best to address these issues now and not in the time immediately after a bereavement
- I do believe that those who have died in the faith of Jesus Christ will rise again – in a resurrected body
- I do believe that we will be with Jesus in heaven, that we shall be like him, that we shall worship God
- As the disciples recognised the risen Lord Jesus, I believe that we will recognise one another
- But we are moving forward to resurrection life in glory and not looking back to life in the here and now
- As Jesus told them, God is the ‘God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’
- The God of Moses too, yet he is the God not of the dead but of the living
- So then, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by that reasoning are alive even though they have died

The great Bible scholar G. B. Caird puts it this way - all life, now and hereafter consists in friendship with God

- death may put an end to physical existence, but not to a relationship that is by nature eternal
- men may lose their friends by death but not God
- Our certainty of resurrection rests not on a theoretical or speculative doctrine
- but on our relationship with God and his eternal love

From this passage we learn something about the resurrection, a word that is repeated in the passage

- Hebrew thought taught resurrection rather than immortality
- The resurrection of the body, rather than the persistence of personality
- Has always been the Christian belief – not disembodied spirits but rising again in the power of Christ

The New Testament letters were written to people living in the culture of Greek thought

- Greek thought included an idea of immortality (what some now call, ‘the persistence of personality’)
- But Christians have always believed that immortality is tied to the resurrection of the body
- Resurrection is not the eternal prolonging of this life but being raised to a new life
- Different from anything on earth – with different relationships

According to Matthew and Mark, Jesus reserves his sharpest criticism for people who misrepresent the Bible

- The Sadducees begin by referring to Moses, but they are wrong because they do not know the Bible
- Showing that it is no good quoting the Bible when you do not study what it says

American New Testament scholar Darrell Bock reminds us

- The resurrection is a central teaching of the Christian faith because on it hangs three central issues
- accountability before God; judgment; eternal life – without resurrection, death would be the end
- our accountability to God would be limited at best to this life
- and judgment and eternal life would become meaningless concepts
- as is often the case today, Sadducees did not believe either in angels or in the resurrection
- they were materialists, dedicated to pursuing this life

In heaven, the quality and purity of relationships will extend far beyond what marriage provides today

- relationships will not be spoiled by sin, all our relationships will be directed by the presence of God
- for those who are most able to affirm that marriage is good, we can only say, ‘heaven will be better’