

Resurrection Life - C/D - 6/11/16 – SJD 8am – Luke 20:27-38

Albert Einstein once said, '*Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds*'. Certainly, during his life Jesus met with a great deal of opposition. This included, his own mother and brothers and even his own disciples. It is ironic that the one group he did not appear to get any opposition from was the puppet rulers of the time, Herod and Pilate, who seemed more fascinated than fearful of his behaviour. The same could not be said of the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees whose opposition to Jesus increased during the 3 years of his ministry. The Gospel reading recounts one of the occasions, near the end of those three years, when the Sadducees tried to test him and make fun of his beliefs.

The Sadducees were religious leaders from priestly and aristocratic families. They probably controlled most of the religious life in Israel at the time. Their beliefs were very conservative. They took a rigorous, literal interpretation of the Torah (the 5 books of Moses), with little regard for the later prophets and no regard at all for the accumulation of oral traditions which were so important to their religious opponents, the Pharisees. Essentially they rejected any beliefs which could not be found in the Torah. This included the ideas of life after death and the resurrection of the dead which were thought to appear in Jewish thought only after the nation return from exile in Babylon. Before that, Jews accepted that life ended with death – there was no afterlife.

Today, the same position is taken by many people in our own society. We are thought simply as biological or physical beings that have a beginning at conception and an end, at death. This is the dogma put out by the atheist community of our time, and is becoming the general groundswell of much of our materialistic western society. Evolutionary theory tells us that the only way we can exist after death is through our genes, passed on through our offspring. As unlikely as it seems, the Sadducees held a similar position, though without any scientific knowledge. They taught that the name of the family could only be continued through their children. This was why central to the story of the great Jewish patriarch, Abraham, is the driving desire to have biological children.

However, in contrast to modern Atheists, the Sadducees still believed in God and in the Torah as their supreme guide. It was from the Torah that they produced their trap for Jesus. Quoting from Deut 25:5-10 they set up a hypothetical situation which they felt demonstrated the impossible position of Jesus' (and the Pharisees) belief in the afterlife and the resurrection from the dead. Because of the need to maintain the family name, Moses had allowed a widow to marry her dead husband's brother to produce children. The Sadducees took this to absurd lengths by suggesting that this happened seven times with the same widow, each time without any children being produced. At the resurrection whose wife would she be?

Jesus combated this in two important ways – both of significant relevance to us today.

1. The Sadducees were misrepresenting resurrection life

Like so many today who believe in life after death, the Sadducees portrayed life after death as much like this life, though, perhaps, with the bad bits taken away. Other faiths do the same. Extreme Islamic militants, for instance, have been taught that to die a martyr's death is to enter paradise with 70 virgins waiting for you!

Jesus contradicts this view. He makes clear that the resurrection life will be radically different from this life. We can see the reality of this if we think of Jesus before and after his own death and resurrection. The Jesus before, was limited like all of us by the biological controls of his body. He slept, was tired, experienced pain as well as joy. However, after his resurrection he could appear and disappear at will, pass through walls, while still be physically touched and prodded (think of Thomas), and could even eat food normally. What is even more important was that Jesus only appeared for 40 days after his resurrection – for he no longer belonged here or was tied to this planet. Jesus teaches in Luke 20:36, that the resurrection life is more like that of an angel than what we now experience. Angels, we know, can appear and disappear like Jesus. The angels that appeared to Abraham ate food he had prepared for them. They walked and could appear human but they weren't.

One essential difference will be that the resurrection body cannot die. Therefore, says Jesus, there will be no need for marriage. Marriage, as we understand it now, is necessary only in this life and will not apply after death. So, after death, the woman in the story is married to none of the brothers as no one is married. The Sadducees logic was completely flawed.

2. The Sadducees were misrepresenting Scripture

Jesus takes the Sadducees back to their scriptures – the Talmud, the 5 books of Moses – and shows them that the very idea of a resurrection life is there in one of the most important events described – when Moses met with God in the Burning Bush (Exod 3:6). God introduces Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – Moses ancestors. Each was long since dead. So the statement that God is '***not God of the dead, but of the living***' can only be true if the named three were alive beyond the grave. The alternative is to think of God as the God of non-existent beings, which is obviously absurd!

Conclusion

Jesus through his life, death, and resurrection demonstrated the reality of life after death something available to all who place their faith in him. This eternal life is not just a future event but begins the moment someone gives their life to Jesus in recognition of his sacrifice for their sin. The Sadducees could only see their future through their children, but we are God's children, reborn with his nature with an eternity to spend in His presence.

Woody Allen once said, ***I am not afraid of death. I just don't want to be there when it happens***'. However, as Jesus showed the Resurrection life is real and on offer to us all. Amen