



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
3 Stanmore Bay Road,
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.
www.ststephenswgp.org.nz

Sermon

Our Hope of the Resurrection

2 Thessalonians 2:1-17; Luke 20:27-38

10/11/2019

© 2015 The Revd Ian Hardcastle

In one of his lighter moments, Benjamin Franklin penned his own epitaph. He didn't profess to be a born-again Christian, but it seems he must have been influenced by Paul's teaching of the resurrection of the body. Here's what he wrote:

The body of B. Franklin, Printer, like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out, and stripped of its lettering and gilding, lies here food for worms. But the work shall not be lost, for it will, as he believed, appear once more in a new and more elegant edition, corrected and improved by the Author.

We are heading towards Advent and so our thoughts turn towards the Second Coming. Today we learn a little of the General Resurrection.

Jesus believed in the resurrection of the dead. Our gospel reading recounts a challenge brought to him by a group of Sadducees. The two main parties in Jewish theological and political life (the two were utterly intertwined) were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection and in the existence of angels. They accepted what we call the Old Testament as the Scriptures – the word of God. On the other hand, the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection or angels and only accepted the Torah as authoritative.

In the midst of the power plays between these parties, Jesus is asked a tricky question by the Sadducees. It was an elaborate question intended to ridicule the idea of resurrection.

There is a provision of the Law from Deuteronomy 25, which was intended to ensure that widows were provided for and that a man would not die childless.

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfil the duty of a brother-in-law to her. ⁶ The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. (Deut 25:5-6)

The Sadducees pose an extreme case where a string of seven brothers all marry a woman in succession and die without issue. Finally the (shattered) widow dies. Whose wife would she be in the resurrection? The idea was to mock the concept of the resurrection of the dead. But Jesus calmly replies that their assumption that resurrection life is just like this life is wrong and so their argument collapses

It is an important issue - Christianity is based on Jesus rising from the dead and we need to have confidence in the promise of resurrection.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus introduces his reply with, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." (Mt 22:29) They must have been shocked! To say they did not know the scriptures which they had memorised from childhood! But he knew more than they because he knew what to look for. He knew more than they because he was filled with the Holy Spirit and had the inspiration to understand them spiritually. We might say, he knew them because he is the Word of God, incarnate. He knew the power of God and they didn't – do we? Do you know the scriptures? Do you know the power of God? If you say there is no resurrection, Jesus would say to you that you do not know the power of God.

He explained:

³⁴ "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵ But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶ and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection."

So first of all, their clever trap question failed because it assumed that a resurrection life would be merely a continuation of this life, but things will be different. Marriage is for this life not for that. There will be no more death and everyone who is found worthy to take part in that age will be like the angels – they will be immortal and they will be children of God.

At my wedding, the preacher said married life is not eternal, so make sure you enjoy it now. It may come as a shock to you that there will be no marriage in the resurrection.

Professor Darrell Bock wrote:

We must remember that the quality and purity of relationships [in the resurrection] will extend far beyond what marriage provides today. Sin will no longer cloud our relationships, and the quality of personal interactions in a world will be directed fully by the presence of God. The absence of evil and the presence of God make marriage as a supportive and protective institution superfluous. For those who hesitate at this remark because their marriage has been good, just remember, heaven will be better. ¹

To say that we won't be married should not be taken to mean we will not know our spouses and families there. The hints and reasonable deductions from Scripture give us every reason to understand that we will know people we have known in this life.

Note, that Jesus speaks of those who are considered worthy to take part in that age. The clear implication is that others will not be found worthy of taking part in that age. We may not like the idea but it does us no service to hide from what our Lord teaches. Are we going to be found worthy to enter that age? Well not by our own goodness – we are only justified by his grace as we put our faith in him. When we do that, we seek to live our lives by his ways and to please him and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

Jesus continues by giving an argument for the resurrection from the Pentateuch. Since they limit their foundation to those five books, he meets them on the ground they trust.

We can take heart from that. God speaks to us in ways we can make sense of. There are revelations and insights which you are particularly suited to receive because of your particular understanding and training – God knows that and will use those things to reach you.

His proof is breathtakingly clever; it is so simple; so profound; so conclusive. The proof he gives them, hangs on a grammatical point - your teacher said grammar was important. Jesus refers Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush.

¹ Bock, D., 1996, The NIV Application Commentary: Luke, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, p520

³⁷ But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'. ³⁸ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."

God did not say, "I was the God of Abraham, etc" although they were long dead. Jesus argued that God is the God of the living not of the dead, so Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still lived at that time. He continues, "...to God all are alive."

We find a confirmation of this from the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus met Moses and Elijah and they have a conversation with him - they were alive and conscious. It is also obvious they will have their personalities and memories because we are told they discuss his departure or in Greek his exodus from Jerusalem. Moses who led the exodus from Egypt discusses the exodus Jesus is about to make from Jerusalem!

Did I miss it?

The epistle addresses another question, has the Day of the Lord come and we missed it? That was a fear felt by the Thessalonians, because some false teachers had sent letters in Paul's name advancing their teachings. Fake news is nothing new! Paul assures them that the Day of the Lord had not come and that before it did there would be a wide-spread rebellion and the Antichrist would come onto the world stage claiming to be God and to receive all worship. The conditions he lists are quite extreme which may help us if we hear some cult leader teaching the second coming is imminent – which happens every so often. Both Jesus and Paul speak of things that must happen first and they are not evident yet.

Some people say the Christian belief in the resurrection is avoidance or merely a projection of our wishes in the face of fear. For example, Bertrand Russell wrote, "I believe that when I die I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive." What a direct contrast to the glorious words of Job who exclaimed in all his suffering:

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. (Job 19:25-27)

The resurrection is not a myth due to our weakness in the face of death. Jesus told his questioners that they did not believe in the resurrection because they did not know the power of God.

St Paul wrote,

I am convinced that neither death nor life ... will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39)

Resurrection is the living God's gift of life. It would be foolish to refuse the gift!

Church, hear the assurance Jesus gives that there is life after death. Hear the assurance that your loved ones are still live because to God all are alive. We do not cease to exist on physical death.

Do you factor the resurrection into your thinking and planning for your own life? If you say you are a Christian, do you believe what the one you call Lord says? If so, you have a glorious hope for the next life.