

Sunday 6th November 2022 – Apprenticed to Jesus #9 ‘Whole’ (Luke 20:27-38)

There are few things more powerful in life than a good question. More often than not, **if we want to know the right answers, we have to ask the right questions.** This is something most of us know to be true, even before we know it: from the moment a toddler starts asking ‘why’, human beings learn to ask questions.

This was good news for me in my working life: before I became a minister I was a market researcher for twelve years, which essentially means I was paid to ask questions: or, to be strictly accurate, to write the questions that lots of interviewers would ask a hundred or a thousand or ten thousand people.

When you work in that kind of job, you realise how important it is to get the question you want to ask right. If there’s a tiny possibility that it might be misunderstood, then the survey is potentially worthless. Or, there might be other consequences: I once got into a bit of hot water running a survey about home security over the phone: we were looking for people who were interested in purchasing an alarm system, and we stupidly began by asking if they already had a alarm system and if not, whether they would consider one. If they answered no to both questions, they didn’t qualify for the survey and we ended the interview. This was about 20 years ago, long before the latest wave of scammers, but even so, this not surprisingly left many people terrified that they’d told a complete stranger that they didn’t have an alarm. I got a rap on the knuckles from our industry body for that one.

(As an aside, we used randomly generated numbers for that survey so had no idea who we were calling, and managed to contact the home phone of someone who worked at a senior level for the secret services, who threatened all kinds of retribution for calling him on his personal phone about his home security.... it was just one of those weeks where everything went wrong.)

But I digress... the point is, if you’re asking someone a question, it’s important to ask a good one. **How much more important, then, if you get the chance to ask Jesus a question.** I don’t know about you, but if I was granted a direct audience with Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem and I could ask him *one* question, I don’t think I’d have asked him what the Sadducees asked him!

Talk about missing the wood for the trees – I love a daft question, as a family we sometimes have a bit of fun with that kind of thing: would you rather have hair made of teeth, or teeth made of hair? Would you rather have the body of a cat, or the feet of a bird? But this question takes the idea of a pointless enquiry to a new level.

The sad thing is, for this group it wasn’t pointless. They were among the wealthiest and most educated members of Jewish society and they loved a good debate. They were known for not believing in the resurrection of the dead, and bizarre as it may sound, this kind of question was one of the reasons why they didn’t believe: how would God sort out all our relational messes in glory? If someone was married seven times, who would she be married to in heaven?

If we’re honest, there’s a bit of the Sadducee in all of us. This encounter is a healthy reminder that we too can get caught up with side issues, we too can miss the wood for the trees.

We too can lose sight of the glorious vision of the kingdom of God because we get hung up on something: we pin the way we live out our faith on whether we do a particular bit of church life a certain way, or we decide that real Christians can only vote for a particular way, or we listen to some random speaker on the internet posing some conspiracy theory about Jesus or the church or the bible, or whatever it is. Sadly the internet is full of wannabe Sadducees, airing their particular hobby horse – and even more sadly, millions of people listen to them. There’s a bit of the Sadducee in all of us.

This episode appears in Matthew and Mark, and Luke’s version is the gentler one. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus begins his answer quite bluntly: ‘Are you not in error,’ he says, ‘because you do not know either the Scriptures or the power of God.’ That put them in their place! And certainly if we know our Scriptures and also the abiding presence of Christ, we’ll be much less likely to get led up the garden path.

But Jesus goes further, doesn’t he, and then addresses the question directly: and the answer is an uncomfortable one for any of us who have happy marriages: there won’t be marriage in heaven. However, we mustn’t miss the reason *why* there will be no marriage in heaven: it’s **because we will be made fully whole**. Our beings will be so complete, so fully alive that we will enjoy a perfect community of love with both God and our fellow human beings. We won’t need a special partner any more.

This might be hard to imagine, but that’s the point. It’s something we receive by faith, and with joy. We are made for eternity, and in heaven this eternity will be real: as Jesus says, we can no longer die, and he uses this lovely phrase: we will be ‘children of the resurrection’.

It’s worth pausing briefly here to remind ourselves that **the word for healing and salvation in the New Testament is the same word: it’s ‘sozo’ and it means to make whole**. In heaven we will be made completely whole (in other words, saved or healed) *on every level*: physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. This is God’s design for us, and this is the big picture the Sadducees were missing.

If they had been keener students of their bibles rather than heated debates, they might not have missed this. As Jesus says, when God appears to Moses in the burning bush, he introduces himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – in other words, these are described as living beings hundreds of years after they died, because **the resurrection is real**. **Our God is the author of life**, and his plan is that we might have life and life in all its fullness. This God longs for us to be made alive – and so we celebrate this God today: the one who rose from the dead, that we too might be children of the resurrection.

As we draw this reflection to a close, give thanks that, by God’s grace, *you* are a child of the resurrection; that *you* have the hope of resurrection life, of complete wholeness in eternity; and also that, even if our bodies wear out, God is able to begin our journey towards wholeness now, because he is the God of the living. God’s ultimate plan for you is wholeness: may God grant us all grace to be led on this journey of wholeness, as we walk from earth into eternity. Amen.