

What do you believe about the Resurrection?

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[0 : 00] On a building site where I worked one time, I got to know the Clark of Works quite well.! And over a coffee break, which is a euphemism for the long period when we didn't do any work, in between actually doing some work on the building site, he told me that he worked 12 hour shifts every day for seven days a week and he'd been doing this for eight or nine years. And I asked him, why would you do that? He always said, I bought a boat. I said, that sounds really nice. I must have been feeling really brave that day because I asked the obvious question, when did you last see your boat? If you're working 12 hours a day, seven days a week for the last eight or nine years, when did you last see your boat? He said, oh, the day I bought it. And parked it down by Baloch.

And I thought to myself, what a waste. What a waste. We know that there's a difference between being alive and living and enjoying life and engaging in life. There's more to life than surviving. Life is not only about quantity. How many hours and days and years do you have? Or indeed for this chap, how much money can you pile up in the bank and never use because the next day you're just going to go and work again? This, it seems to me, is the real issue at the heart of our reading. This is the real disagreement between the Sadducees and Jesus about the resurrection. In John chapter 10, Jesus said that he had come to give life in all its fullness. Not just survival, but more than survival. Not just breathing in and breathing out. Getting up in the morning, having your breakfast, going to work, coming home, having your dinner, going to bed to do it all again the next day.

Jesus has come that there might be a quality in our lives. Jesus comes and brings the resurrection and the life of the resurrection with him.

We need to unpack a wee bit. It was really only in the post-enlightenment 17th century that people widely began to doubt the reality of life after death. Before that time, and certainly in the time of Jesus, no one doubted that there would be life after death. It wasn't a discussion topic.

[3 : 06] You may remember in Homer's Odyssey, how the hero, Odysseus, is sent to the island of the dead, where he meets his friend, the hero Achilles. Achilles in life had been the greatest hero of all time.

The one man who single-handedly turned the tide of the Greek war against the Trojans and led to their victory. In death, Achilles appears as a pitiful shade. In torment, not of active suffering, but of passive inactivity.

He has become completely insubstantial. Achilles could do nothing, could enjoy nothing, and almost the only thing that he knew was that the living were already beginning to forget him.

That's what people thought life after death was all about in the ancient world, and indeed all through the Dark Ages and most of the Middle Ages up to the time of the Enlightenment, when they decided they didn't like that, and they would just choose not to believe it.

There was no escape, no joy, no quality of life. Now, that is not resurrection. Homer did not write about resurrection in the Odyssey.

[4 : 38] That is not what the word resurrection has ever meant. Quite simply, the word resurrection does not mean life after death.

Let's look at another story. You'll be pleased, this one's from the Bible, John chapter 11. Jesus' friend Lazarus has died. Four days later, Jesus comes to Bethany, the hometown of Lazarus and his two sisters.

And Martha comes rushing out to meet Jesus. And you'll remember how that conversation went. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

But even now, four days after we buried him, I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. Martha is thinking only that Jesus has the power to ask God, And God has the power to revive

her brother.

To bring him back to this life again. Jesus answered her, your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know he will rise again.

[5 : 52] In the resurrection on the last day. Jesus assures Martha that her brother will rise again. Not that he will be revived. They're not talking about revival.

They're talking about entering into the life of the kingdom of God. Martha, knowing the promises of the Old Testament, already knows this.

Martha understands that the resurrection, the life of the kingdom of God will happen. But in her understanding, only at the last day.

At some time in the future, God will bring an end to this age of creation. And that will be the last day. And at that time, the resurrection will happen.

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

[6 : 58] Do you believe this? It was important for Martha to hear what Jesus was saying. It's important for us to hear what Jesus is saying about the resurrection.

The resurrection is not about life after death. The resurrection is not waiting for you at some point in the future. Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Resurrection and life belong together. Because Jesus has come, this is the last day. The last day started when Jesus was born at Bethlehem.

And every moment since then has been the last day. Because Jesus has come, the resurrection has started.

It is now. So don't stumble here. The last day is not a period of 24 hours before the end of the world.

[8 : 07] The last day is that era of human history between the first coming of the Lord Jesus and his coming again. And that's where we are living now.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. And today is the last day. And the resurrection has started. And so it's time to get back to Matthew.

And be in Jerusalem with Jesus and these Sadducees. The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection. They are not denying life after death.

That's not what they're talking about. They are denying the possibility of a quality of life after death. They are denying the possibility of a quality of life in the presence of God before death.

They really don't want anything to change. They are the powerful and the rich and they're happy with the status quo. And God can just wait till they are finished. Thank you very much.

[9 : 17] Marriage is one of God's good gifts to us. To be enjoyed and celebrated. They take the example of marriage. And one of the challenges of navigating marriage.

Childlessness. And one of the answers to childlessness that the Jewish customs had come up with. This principle of multiple marriages to different brothers by the same poor woman.

And they use this to mock the possibility of resurrection. They're really not interested in marriage. What they're interested in.

Is putting a pinprick in the balloon of Jesus teaching about the resurrection. And watching it all deflate before their eyes.

In his reply Jesus corrects their error. And gives us good cause to hope in the resurrection. Jesus answered and said you're wrong.

[10 : 16] Because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. The whole scriptures. The Old Testament and the New Testament. Teach the reality of life in all its fullness.

In the presence of God. The power of God is so great. That nothing. Nothing can separate us from him. And his love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God in the gospel has fixed his love upon you. And not even death. Will keep him from you. And not even life.

Because God's love for you. Begins now. And has already started. This is the reality of the resurrection.

Made real in our lives. By union with Christ. And the power of the Holy Spirit. Taught to us. In the scriptures. Jesus said. For in the resurrection.

[11 : 16] They neither marry nor are given in marriage. But are like the angels in heaven. Now here's a lesson in Bible reading. Which part of that verse do you find most interesting?

The bit at the beginning. About neither marrying nor being given in marriage. Or the bit that Jesus really wanted to say. About those who live in the resurrection.

Being like the angels in heaven. I guess we fixate on the first half of this verse. And we ask questions. Will we be married in heaven?

Will that happen? What will it be like? Jesus. Uses the example of marriage. Because he's been given it. In the question of the Sadducees.

But what he really wants to teach us about. Is the resurrection. That's the important part of the verse for Jesus. Those living in the resurrection.

[12:15] Are like the angels. Because they live in the presence of God. The one certain thing. We know about angels. Is that they are continually.

In God's presence. And Jesus is trying to see. The resurrection is that. Being continually. In God's presence.

And once we grasp that. Why would we want to delay the resurrection. To the end of the world.

Why would we want to delay it.

For one more minute. Because we want to live. Like the angels. In the presence of God. Now. And Jesus continued.

As for the resurrection of the dead. Have you not read. What was said to you by God. I am the God of Abraham. The God of Isaac. The God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead. But the God of the living.

[13:14] Because all are living to him. Death is a big thing for us. But for God. All are living to him.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Are alive in God's presence. As much as they were. When they walked and breathed. On the land of Canaan. Nearly 2,000 years before Jesus.

God is the God of all creation. One Lord. One King. One God. He is the God. Of the living. And the dead. In this context.

Jesus speaks to us. About the resurrection. And he is trying to make the point. That all are living to God. This is what the resurrection is.

Being alive to God. And living. In God's presence. My family love it. When I include them in sermons.

[14:14] This is not a story. However, about hoovers. Andrew found me one day. Reading. Big surprise. I became aware.

I became aware that his head was kind of tilting to the side. As he read the title of the book. Down the spine of the book. The title of the book was.

Practice. Resurrection. Resurrection. He looked confused. Which is not unusual. And then he asked. How do you practice resurrection?

If resurrection is only life after death. Andrew's question makes perfect sense. How do you practice life after death?

And why would you want to? But if the word resurrection is about so much more than that. If the word resurrection is about living in the reality of God's presence.

[15:14] Which begins now. And seamlessly continues into eternity. And perhaps there's something in the title of that book.

Today we live in the age of the resurrection. We live after Jesus was born in Bethlehem. And before he comes again. We live in the last day. The age of the resurrection.

Today is the day when the disciples of Jesus. Those who celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We are called to live in the resurrection.

We are resurrection people. Today as the spirit works in our lives. That which is promised in the resurrection.

Our being in the presence of God. Becomes real. In our experience. Day by day. Moment by moment. As we practice resurrection.

[16:16] The word practice of course can be used in two senses. Practice to get better at what you're doing. But it can also be used in the sentence.

Put that into practice. Just do it. Jesus didn't come. Only to take us away.

From our life. From this world. From this creation. And somehow transport us. To some other place. Which we might call heaven.

Jesus came to enhance. To magnify. Our lives. To give us a quality of life. Today. That belongs.

To the kingdom of heaven. A quality of life. Which is enhanced. By our living it in the presence of God. To live resurrection lives.

[17:16] Of faith in Jesus. Our lives characterized. By hope. And peace. And joy. To live resurrection lives. Means that we live lives.

Of service. Lives which give themselves. To bless others. Lives which long to see. Others brought into the experience.

Of resurrection. Knowing Jesus as their saviour. God as their father. And his presence with them. In their lives today. Living resurrection lives.

Of service. Are about feeding the hungry. And clothing the naked. And caring for the sick. And acting justly. For the vulnerable. Because resurrection lives.

Are about more than quantity. They are about quality of life. And not just for ourselves. But for all creation. Living lives of resurrection.

[18:16] Commits us. To caring. For our creation. And our planet. And our environment. The resurrection. The resurrection. Is not about us.

Escaping. From life today. But it is about. Transforming. Our lives today. That we live. In the presence of God.

And the Sadducees. Didn't want that. And they tried to mock Jesus. And steal our hope. From us. But Jesus.

Is the resurrection. And the life. What is the resurrection? It is our life. As disciples of Jesus.

It is our service. And our mission. In all our days. Until Christ comes. Or calls us home. We are to put into practice.

[19:14] We are to get on. And live the life. Of the resurrection. Which Jesus has won for us. Today. And every day. With every breath.

As we follow Jesus. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.