

A Tricky Question

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[0 : 00] You're a God who speaks. So Lord, we pray tonight that we would hear you speaking to each one of us. Not only would we hear you, but we would obey.

And we ask this for the sake of, in the name of, the living word, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, in Eastern religions, a classic example would be Hinduism.

Reincarnation, that is the belief in bodily re-existence in this world after death. Reincarnation is actually not considered to be a particularly exciting experience.

In fact, it's referred to as samsara. The idea is trapped in this endless cycle of death and rebirth in a painful and dying world.

Well, for a lot of Aussies, though, Aussies, they have their own homegrown theology of what happens when you die. I mean, typically, this homegrown theology of your average Aussie has lots of connections with the favourite pastimes of the person who's just passed away.

[1 : 13] Some years ago, I attended a funeral that graphically illustrated this Aussie doctrine of the afterlife. A number of friends of the deceased paid tribute to him at the funeral.

They assured the assembled mourners, a group larger than gathered here tonight, that their friend was, in fact, at that moment, looking down on them. His arm was sort of propped up on that, sorry about that, propped up on that big bar in the sky.

And he was just enjoying and sipping on an extraordinarily smooth bourbon. Some people, of course, but I don't think it's all that high in percentage terms, don't believe in the afterlife.

That is, when you're dead, you're dead. After his heart attack in 1990, Kerry Packer is reported as saying, I've been to the other side and let me tell you, son, there's, expletive, nothing there.

Well, on Friday at that publicly funded celebration, which was kind of unusual in itself, but a publicly funded celebration of Kerry's life at the Sydney Opera House, the Prime Minister noted that that statement was one of the three most famous statements made by Kerry in his whole life.

[2 : 33] It was interesting, though, that in the documentary that was filmed the night before, last Thursday night, the documentary on the life of the big fella, Kerry Packer, his son James is actually not so sure about his dad's statement.

You see, James said, look, to be there with a body that was so different to his character, which was so alive, well, it made me think that there must be something.

And so I'm taking the positive and I'm hoping and I'm wishing that he's up there looking down on us. As I thought about that, I guess my first reaction was, well, I'm not surprised by James Packer's response.

I don't know whether you've experienced and witnessed death. Not experienced, witnessed death. Someone physically alive one moment and then physically dead the next.

If you've witnessed that, it's very arresting. You're sort of left with questions. I mean, what's happened? I mean, is this all?

[3 : 48] Where's the person? How do we make sense out of our existence? Well, if you were with us two Sunday nights ago, you recall that as we looked at the opening to chapter 12 through chapter 11, as you read through chapter 11, there's this growing hostility to the man, Jesus of Nazareth.

And if you're here last Sunday night, then you recall that the Pharisees and the Herodians, they failed in their attempt to trap Jesus. You'd remember that those two groups had sought to corner Jesus with a political question, a political question about paying taxes to Rome.

And tonight as we come to this part of chapter 12, another group of antagonists join in the confrontation with Jesus, the Sadducees.

It's actually their first appearance in Mark's gospel. And if you look with me as we go through this passage, Mark chapter 12, page 825, simply look how Mark introduces them in verse 18. Some Sadducees who say, there is no resurrection. See, in an ironic way, the Sadducees actually held a similar view to the big fella, Kerry Packer.

[5 : 07] I say ironic because the Sadducees were the Jewish priestly aristocracy. They denied the resurrection.

And that's why they were sad, you see. Did you get that, Lisa? Sad, you see? Now, they don't deny the resurrection because they're what we might call liberals.

That wasn't the case at all. In fact, the Sadducees were the conservatives, both politically and theologically. But for the Sadducees, the very idea of the resurrection was regarded as a dangerous new idea.

They held to the five books of Moses from Genesis through to Deuteronomy. And they held that these were the books that were truly authoritative. And according to the Sadducees, when you went through those five books, they didn't teach the resurrection.

You see, the clearest Old Testament text on the resurrection is Daniel 12, verse 2. But the Sadducees rejected that as not being part of Scripture.

[6 : 19] Well, in Deuteronomy, in Deuteronomy 25, verses 5 to 10, the law says that if a man dies, married but childless, then his younger brother is commanded to marry his widow and to count any children that they have as his brothers.

You see, in that way, the widow is cared for, but importantly, the family line and the inheritance is kept. That's the background. So the Sadducees set their trap.

If you like, they put forward this worst-case scenario. It's a conundrum. See, what if a woman marries seven times to all brothers and no children from any of them?

And then she dies. The Sadducees, you see, the very idea of the resurrection is simply ridiculous. And you can just imagine them standing around in their smokeness.

The Pharisees and the Herodians failed in trapping Jesus, but we've actually really set him up. You see, talking about the resurrection is simply nonsense and Jesus has no authority from God.

[7 : 35] So they ask in verse 23, in the resurrection, whose wife will she be? For the seven had married her. Of course, if you think about that, there's a basic problem with their question because the implicit assumption behind that question is that the resurrection bodies are exactly the same as bodies now, including the capacity for sexual intercourse.

Now, Jesus rebukes them and in rebuking them, he gives them a two-part answer. He says to them, listen, you actually don't know your Bibles. See, the rest of the Old Testament is also Scripture where the doctrine of the resurrection is clear.

One rebuke. And secondly, the Sadducees had a pitiful view of the power of God. And let's look at that one first. Look with me at verse 25.

You see, verse 25, Jesus is actually describing the radical power of God. It's a radical power that brings about transformation because resurrection is not just simply being brought back to life like resuscitation.

Resurrection is transformation. It's a different sort of bodily life to what we know and experience now. It's transformation.

[8 : 58] It's a radical change. And God's power is such that he will transform us into creatures who don't engage in sexual relations or procreation.

See, that's the point of the reference to the angels in the passage. But the reference is a double-edged argument by Jesus because the Sadducees also didn't believe in the existence of angels.

So, it's important for us to know from the teaching of the New Testament that at the resurrection we're not going to be a disembodied spirit. We're not going to be a disembodied spirit like an angel. But we will be like the angels in this respect. We will not marry. You see, when we're resurrected, we're going to be beyond death.

There's going to be no need to propagate the species. And of course, propagating the family line, that was the whole point of the law about the brother marrying the widow.

[10 : 01] So, in this resurrection life, we'll live forever. There's going to be entirely new relationships between resurrected humans. There isn't going to be any need for marriage.

There's going to be no need to produce little kitties to fill up the earth. But I wonder whether that lack of marriage comes as a shock to our modern Western ears.

I suspect it does. In biblical times, of course, it wasn't as if love and romance were absent from marriage. I mean, as you read the Song of Songs, it's clear.

And you see that also in Ephesians 5. I think we can say this, that in biblical times, there was a greater focus on providing a home where children could be raised and nourished.

Now, that idea is obviously not absent in our world, but it's a less visible concern. Just this week, I heard of some Australian statistics concerning children born out of marriage.

[11:06] This is pretty startling. I don't know whether you heard it. In the Northern Territory, a staggering two-thirds of all births are outside of marriage. And second of the Northern Territory is Tasmania.

Victoria was actually extremely conservative. It was way down that list, but two-thirds born outside of marriage in the Northern Territory. In the resurrection, we'll live forever in God's presence with God's people.

There'll be entirely new relationships between resurrected humans. So maybe one way to think about that is even in this fallen sinful world, there are lots of enjoyments, aren't there, in relationships.

relationships. And whatever enjoyment you receive from relationships now, such enjoyment is going to seem insignificant compared to the everlasting joy of being in the presence of God and his people in the new heaven and the new earth.

And when you think about it, girls, there's a great bonus in this. I mean, there is no need to spend hours different clothes trying on, painting the face before a date.

[12:21] Well, we've got a few smiles in the audience. People seem to relate a little bit to that. One commentator has said, in the life to come, all interpersonal relationships will no doubt far surpass the most intimate and pleasurable of human intercourse as we know it.

These Sadducees, they were part of the religious hierarchy. They've got a pitiful view of the power of God. Of course, in our own generation, we see this unbelief, we see this scepticism, sometimes in groups loosely associated with the church, at least the visible church.

John Crossman, you may have heard of the Jesus Seminar, he's one of the leaders of the Jesus Seminar, says this, I don't think that anyone, anywhere, at any time, brings dead people back to life. this is the leader of the bunch trying to work out which words in the New Testament were the authentic words of Jesus. Well, for John Crossman and all of the sceptics, there is a resurrection. We will be transformed and we'll enjoy far deeper and joyous relationships than we do now. That's the first rebuke by Jesus.

[13:46] So then let's look at his second rebuke. So Jesus starts by making interestingly a point of connection with the Sadducees because he argues from the books of the Old Testament that they actually took as authoritative.

And just as a side application of that, it's a great model. You see it also with Paul in Acts 17 when he's in Athens on Mars Hill when he makes this connection with those philosophers that are standing around.

So let me encourage you that when you're sharing the gospel, when you're defending the faith, to seek to make early connections with those who you might be speaking to.

Now this argument that Jesus puts forward, I readily admit on the surface at least, might seem a little obtuse. But we know from the parallel account of this in Matthew's gospel that the argument wasn't lost on the listeners.

Look with me at verses 26 and 27. Jesus says, And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

[15:02] He's the God not of the dead but of the living. You are quite wrong. In Exodus 3 we read that God meets Moses at the burning bush and the Lord introduces himself as Abraham's God, Isaac's God and Jacob's God.

I want you to particularly notice there the present tense. Notice that I am. God doesn't say I was their God. What does he say?

He says I am their God. God. See, even though these patriarchs had died physically, they're still alive at the time of the writing of the book of Exodus.

They still exist. We know that because God continues in a relationship with them as their God. So if they're still alive, even though physically dead, and if the rest of Scripture points to the reality of the resurrection, then the Sadducees should believe God's power to raise the patriarchs.

The Sadducees don't know their Bibles and they have a pitiful view of the power of God. God. Well, let's then consider this encounter recorded in Scripture in relation to our own lives.

[16:29] Let me ask, is it possible for us, us as Christians, to adopt attitudes, to adopt worldviews, somewhat like the Sadducees?

Think with me about discounting the power of God. God. If I think of my own life, I find it easy to affirm, to speak about the power of God.

But I find it somewhat harder to live in the reality of that, moment by moment. The power that raised Jesus from the dead is available for every Christian, moment by moment.

God. It's a big statement, isn't it? But that's what Paul says at the end of Ephesians chapter 1. Think about that power that raised Jesus from the dead.

J.B. Phillips wrote a little book many years ago simply called *Your God is Too Small*. And how easy it is for each of us to practically diminish God in the way we live our lives.

[17:39] The way we live our lives and to doubt God's power as we seek to minister for the Lord, to minister His grace to a hurting world, to a physically, emotionally and spiritually dying world.

To doubt the power of God as we take the gospel out. But God's power changes lives. That's the testimony of scripture. That should be our own testimony of our own life if we know the Lord Jesus. God's power breaks the stranglehold of addictions. God's power can break us out from the prison of the devil being, if you like, captured in the kingdom of darkness.

You see, the Bible simply says there are these two kingdoms. There's the kingdom of God and there's the kingdom of darkness. An entrance to God's kingdom is only secured through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's why Paul says, for I'm not ashamed of the gospel. It's the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith. To the Jew first and also to the Greek.

[18:52] But having been rescued by God's power from that kingdom of darkness, God's power continues to be available to us, to every believer moment by moment.

And the source of power that raised Jesus from the dead is the Holy Spirit. And scripture commands us in Ephesians 5 to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

That's not achieved by some fancy little ritual, by following some formula. We'll know this power of God in our lives as we turn from known sin, as we open ourselves up to God's word and as we yield to the Holy Spirit.

So let's remember that firstly God's power rescues us from the peril, that just unbelievably tragic situation of being in the kingdom of darkness.

God's power does that. And God's power is available moment by moment as we live out our lives. So increasingly change us into the likeness of Christ.

[19:59] Christ. But there's a third point. God's power will transform our mortal bodies into glorified bodies. Glorified bodies like the Lord Jesus at the resurrection.

That's why Paul says to the Christians in Corinth, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed.

So don't be sad, you see, discounting the power of God. But let me also then ask, is it possible for us as Christians to adopt attitudes, to adopt worldviews, a little bit like the Sadducees when it comes to Scripture?

We need to be on our guard not to sort of box God into the parts of the Bible that we are most comfortable with. It might be just that our personality thinks, yeah, I really like those aspects of what I read in Scripture.

Or perhaps we read the Bible all the time through sort of a filter of this is the way that I reckon God ought to be acting in the world. One of the great mottos of the Reformers back in the 16th century in relation to Scripture was in English, always reforming.

[21:25] So we need to approach God's Word with a humility that's both individually and corporately to be continually reformed by it and the Spirit's ministry in each of our lives.

So don't be sad, you see. Don't discount the power of God. Don't selectively apply Scripture. And I want to then thirdly just make one or two comments about resurrection.

Resurrection is central to the Christian faith. I mean quite simply, Paul says if there's no resurrection, we're idiots, we're fools. The Lord Jesus died and he rose from the dead. George went on a vacation to the Middle East with most of his family and he took his mother-in-law along with him. And during the vacation while they were visiting Jerusalem, George's mother-in-law actually died.

And so he takes the death certificate in his hand and he goes to his consulate office to make arrangements for the body to be sent back home for a proper burial. Well, the consul after hearing of the death of the mother-in-law says to George, look, sending the body back for burial is really expensive.

[22 : 42] It could cost perhaps more than \$5,000. And he said, look, in most cases what people do is that they just simply decide to bury the body here.

It's only probably going to cost about \$150. Well, George thought about it and then he responds to the consul. He says, look, I don't care how much it costs to send the body back. That's what I want to do.

Well, the consul after hearing this said to him, George, you must have really loved your mother-in-law. I mean, when you think about that difference, that's going to cost you. Well, no, it's not that, said George.

You see, I know of a case many, many years ago of a person that was buried here in Jerusalem and on the third day he was resurrected. Consequently, I don't want to take that chance.

Friends, Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection.

[23 : 42] He's the inauguration of the new creation. And so for those who are united to the Lord Jesus Christ at the resurrection, our bodies will be transformed into a glorious body, just like our Lord's.

Jesus' bodily resurrection, it's a sign. It's a sign of our future resurrection when we're going to get this extraordinary gift of an incorruptible body.

Jesus tells us in John's Gospel, in fact, that this resurrection is going to be universal. He says, look, don't be astonished at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their grace will hear the Son of Man's voice and will come out, those who've done good to the resurrection of life, those who've done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.

There's a cemetery in Hanover in Germany and in that grave were placed huge slabs of granite and marble. They were cemented together and then they were fastened with heavy steel clasps.

Belongs to a woman who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. Strangely, though, she directed in a will that a grave be made so secure that if in fact there was a resurrection, it wouldn't reach her.

[24 : 59] And on the marker were inscribed these words, this burial place must never be opened. Well, in time, just a little seed covered over by some stones, it grew and slowly it pushed away through the soil out from beneath them.

And as the trunk enlarged, the great slabs were gradually shifted. So that the steel clasps, in fact, were wrenched from their sockets.

You see, this tiny little seed had become a tree that had pushed aside the stones. And that dynamic life force in that little seed, that is just the faintest reflection of the tremendous power of God's Word that someday will call to life all bodies of all who've died.

Unbelief cannot and will not hold back the resurrection. Everyone is going to receive a resurrected body.

But it's either resurrection to life or resurrection to condemnation. Because not everyone is going to enter the recreated universe.

[26 : 22] God is not going to allow this new universe to be messed up by sin. So the Bible describes the reality of a place, a place set aside for Christ rejecters.

And it is a fearful prospect. But if you like, the bad news can be transformed into good news.

There's no need to suffer that fate. Any human being can live in the new heaven and the new earth. The entrance to the new heaven and new earth is so straightforward.

So straightforward, but extraordinarily costly. It costs the Son of God his earthly life. The entrance is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith in his death and resurrection. So this resurrection for believers, I hope you agree with me, is a most fantastic prospect.

[27 : 24] We clearly haven't been given all, in fact we've been given very few details about this radically transformed life. If we had, I'm sure we wouldn't understand them and comprehend them, living in our earthly fallen world.

But what do we do as the Lord's people we trust? Our hope, our settled, our total confidence in the glorious future that awaits all of God's children is based on faith in the power of God and that alone. There is a resurrection and we need to proclaim that truth and we need to proclaim that truth in love to an Australian culture that typically either denies the afterlife and the resurrection or simply conceives of the afterlife in a way that's not biblical.

Don't be sad, you see. Trust in the power of God. Indeed, yield to the Holy Spirit and know that power in your daily life.

Be continually reformed by all of God's word and the Spirit's ministry. Being a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ guarantees, it guarantees that we are included in the resurrection of life.

[28 : 55] A life in the presence of God and all of his people for all of eternity with joy and excitement that simply vastly exceeds the best of our earthly experience.

When you think about it, try and imagine it. We ought to just about take our breath away the very thought of that. What a fantastic privilege it is as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ to worship, to serve, who?

The God of the living. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.