

Becoming human- giving glory x08 Sunday 25th February_2018.

Human condition: questions about death. Background text: Matthew 22: 23 - 33. (READ in parallel Mark 12: 18 – 27 and Luke 20: 27 – 40. Question about rising from death) Genesis 2: 16 -17. (READ).

Last week I told you about the AURIGA – originally it referred to a Roman slave – a chauffeur who stood behind a victorious general as he rode into a street in triumph, parading the captors. The Auriga had gladiator status, even though a slave and drove a biga drawn by 2 horses. The Auriga in victory parades stood behind the general holding a laurus crown over his head but his main task was to constantly lean forward and whisper in the triumphant general's ear, "**Remember you are mortal**". (*Memento homo – you are only a man*). *You will die*. We need to hear these words in our ear: spoken by God and not the voice of fear.



Picture:

Our AIM for the beginning of this year will be for each of us individually and all of us together to explore what it means to be truly human. The Latin phrase "Memento Mori" – remember you have to die has passed into our language. It is a **serious Christian practice to reflect on our mortality**. It is a means of considering the vanity (passing vapour - Ecclesiastes 3) of earthly life and the transient nature of earthly goods and pursuits. Jesus in the NT was not averse to reminding people that we will all die and be called to give account for our lives to God. (It is increasingly my view that to think about our death means we can live life more fully in the now. Remove the *sting of death* and it no longer has power to terrorise us. (1C 15: 56, 57).

DEATH – mortality becomes a part of our human condition (**Genesis 2: 16, 17**). **No one is immortal – except by gift of God** (*Romans 6: 23*). The fact of our mortality is something which should challenge our human pride and limit us in a way which makes us creaturely rather than thinking we are gods.

We have been asking: what does this consequence of "death" mean? They did not drop dead immediately – they "began" to die, in their soul death and **become mortal**. Initially it meant the interruption of human fellowship with God. That "**walking-talking relationship**" **was interrupted**. When God comes to walk and talk with Adam (humanity) in the garden in the cool of the evening the man and the woman hide from God. (*3: 8 God cries: Where are you?*). Some obvious consequences are the entry of

both **fear and loneliness** into the human experience. We also see **blame, shame and guilt** enter into the human consciousness and **lying and fake truth take over**.

Death including mortality is part of the human condition. We have eaves-dropped on the Godhead as we previously referred to the Book of *Genesis in the Bible* where the primeval history of Chapters 1 – 11 causes us to consider and hear the voice of Godhead saying: -

Let US make humanity in our image – they will be like us and resemble us...So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female ... TEV Genesis 1:26 & 27.

These chapters are the Judeo-Christian mythic tale of the creation and population of the earth including the creation and Fall of humanity from “perfection”. (Myth – a story telling us a greater truth).

This is a foundational and central belief of Christians (and other Abrahamic faiths) that men and women are like God and resemble God and therefore God is **not totally other** or totally foreign to human beings. Through thousands of generations Abrahamic faiths have held this as self-evident but also taught that human behaviour and choices have estranged us both from God, one another and the rest of creation. Christians have argued that even after the Fall of human beings into doing evil as well as good that human beings still show something of the image and likeness of God (*Genesis 9:6 Human beings were made like God. (We are like/ resemble God – we are not the same as God)*). The NT introduces Jesus of Nazareth, as the Messiah who challenges us with what it means to be truly human and about what essentially dis-figures human beings. He is revealed as the only true human being who comes as Saviour of the World – to redeem and restore humanity.

“All” INCLUSIVE!

James 3: 9 describes all human beings as made in God’s likeness and therefore challenges us to treat all others with dignity and expectation). Even though **all** fall short of God’s glory because all have sinned (*Romans 3: 23*)

But we need to **remember that the solution to death is presented in Jesus Christ:** *For just as death came by means of a man, in the same way the rising from death comes by means of a man. For just as ALL people die because of their history with Adam, in the same way ALL will be raised to life because of their union with Christ. (1 Corinthians 15: 21).*

Question: about rising from the dead. Matthew 22: 23 – 33. The Sadducees put their question to Jesus They were “sad you see” because they did not believe that there would be a Resurrection of the dead or any life after death. (They were the social elite, wealthy and powerful e.g. Chief Priests). The Pharisees did believe in life after death and some sort of bodily resurrection. We probably if we allow ourselves to think about

death and our relationship with the dead have many questions. Some of which can be answered in this life and some of which no doubt we will have to wait and see.

JESUS demonstrates clearly in his answer that **“God is God of the living and not the dead”**. Just as surely as we will die (*Hebrews 9: 27*) - **there will be a Resurrection** – even though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have died he told Moses that he is their God – inference - because they are alive. The Sadducees present a hypothetical case (in order to floor Jesus) of the woman who marries a man who dies without fathering children but he has six brothers (*Levirate Marriage*)...**v28 On the day the dead rise to life, whose wife will she be? All of them have married her?**

Jesus said that they were **wrong on 2 counts**: one they didn't understand the Scriptures and secondly, they didn't personally know God's power. (They only regarded the Pentateuch as having authority - not the Psalms or the Prophets. Jesus quotes from the Pentateuch to establish that God is a God of those who are alive even though they have died). We as believers often can be wrong on the same 2 counts: either we don't seriously get to grips with what the Judeo-Christian Bible teaches, or we are not experiencing God's power in our lives. Jesus taught the resurrection of the body and not just the continuity of the soul. (Grek world view).

Jesus also makes the point that though some things after death may remain the same other things will change. **For in the resurrection, they neither marry or are given in marriage but are as the angels of God in heaven (v30)** Relationships in “heaven” are of a different order to those of this world. There is a claim by Jesus that the marriage relationship as practiced by the Jews will not exist in the “resurrection”. (What it means to say that we “will be like the angels” has been greatly discussed as you can imagine. Does it mean that sexuality will be expressed no longer in a physical way (coitus – sex act) but in all the other ways we express it even in this life?). Sexuality is obviously integral to being human and therefore a key part of every one of us. It is expressed not just in coitus – the sexual act but sexuality is seen in also sorts of creativity, relationships and personality expressions. How will it be expressed in the Resurrection? I think it is not necessary to be sexually active to be fulfilled and fully human but it is necessary to be able to express our sexuality.

Life after death fascinated not just the Jews but most other human beings. Life after death is not necessarily the same as eternal life or even Resurrection Life which Christians believe in. Jesus' life, death and resurrection are obviously foundational to Christians ways of interpreting Scriptures and looking forward to resurrection life beyond this “mortal coil”.

The Sadducees were earth bound they had no eschatological hope for the future Eschatology is the part of theology concerned with the final events of history, the ultimate destiny of humanity. It is not just about the “end of the world” but rather about the “new heaven and new earth”, the dwelling of God with humanity, the healing of the nations, the coming of justice and shalom in the full expression of the Kingdom of God. It is about bodily resurrection and the redemption of creation through Jesus Christ. It is about oneness with ourselves, with others and with God. It is not about escapism but about living in the reality of the now with all its struggles whether they appear purposeful or not.

The Sadducees didn't just not know the Scriptures which were authoritative and therefore binding – they did not know God's power to raise the dead. Jesus demonstrated both – the power of Scripture and also the power of the Father, Jesus and Spirit over death (the Godhead).

In the Resurrection marriage as we know it will be a thing of the past (contrary to what even the Pharisees taught – so Jesus corrected not just the Sadducees but also the Pharisees). I am not saying those who have been married will not know and recognize those they have loved. Nor am I saying that the Samaritan woman will not recognize and know the 5 partners or husband she had, nor that others will not recognize those they have loved **I am simply saying that clothed in our resurrection bodies we will express love and relationship in ways we do not yet fully know.**

Old Testament: *Millions who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake* – wrote the prophet *Daniel 12: 2*. The hope **of life after death is entirely due to the generosity of God – eternal life is a gift** not a right. God is the God of our ancestors – whoever they are – he is the God of the living. This hints strongly at life with God and God's people forever. The New Testament unpacks some more of what it will be like.

We don't know if the Sadducees changed their minds because they were convinced but we read that the crowds were amazed at Jesus' teaching.