

Matthew 22:23-46 sermon Tregear 5.12.2021 – Q and A – going for the knockout punch

You've probably heard the statement the only certainties in life are taxes and death. The only things that we know for sure will happen are taxes and death. What do you think? Someone else said the only certain things are taxes, death and trouble. That's probably true too.

Well last week Jesus answered the question about taxes. Now there's a question about resurrection – what happens to us after we die? And trouble? Well, the Pharisees and Sadducees are seeking to make trouble for Jesus. In fact, it's a bit like Jesus is in a boxing ring with these Jewish leaders. They want to bring him down. This question time is like a boxing match.

Last week, Round One – Pharisees and Herodians ask about paying taxes to Caesar. They've got Jesus in the corner now, they think. Boom! Jesus' answer – Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give back to God what is God's. A left right combination that sends them sprawling into their corner.

Now, in v.23 – 33: Round Two, here come the Sadducees. They're going to try and knock Jesus out. They don't want any change to Judaism, the way they worshipped God. And they didn't believe in resurrection after death. Most Jews did believe that there was a resurrection in some way, but not the Sadducees. So they come to Jesus with this story, of a highly unlikely situation. One woman being married to seven different men who all died. When they get to heaven who would be her husband? There's a few things here. Firstly, they quote what is to us a rather strange law from the bible in Deuteronomy 25:5, that if a married man dies childless, his brother must marry the widow, and the children that they have will count as the heirs of the dead man. This law was vital for the people of God way back in Moses' time, because it meant that the family line which was so important and God had promised, that it would continue. So far as possible, the people were to prevent family lines and tribal identity dying out in Israel. This was one way of doing this.

But Jesus had come to bring about God's renewal of his people. They will now be a worldwide family, marked not by ethnic origin or tribal identity but by the new creation of the gospel. The old laws designed to keep the family going will be irrelevant. So that's one reason why we should reject the Sadducees story.

The second thing. The Sadducees have it all wrong about resurrection. Jesus says very clearly that everyone will be resurrected to live for ever, either with God or apart from God. Death will be left behind.

The power of God changes us and gives to believers "resurrection bodies"; we're used to bodies that are decaying all the time, but we will have non-decaying bodies.

What is a resurrection body? Well, we don't know exactly but we have some clues. Probably one of the best clues we have is that we see what Jesus was like after he rose from the dead. He had flesh and a body like us – remember he told Thomas to come and put his hand in his side where the spear had gone. So it's some kind of solid body. Yet, he is also able to appear and disappear as we see when he comes into the room where the disciples are. The room was locked but he enters somehow through the walls or the door. And then when he's with the 2 followers at Emmaus he disappears. Will we be able to do that? I don't know. But in some ways we will be similar it seems.

Jesus makes it clear that there will be no marriage in heaven. This seems a bit hard, especially if we really loved our spouse. But it's true. There are some Christian groups that say that there will be marriage in heaven. The Mormons actually encourage people to have a special marriage ceremony in their temples that will make it certain you will stay married in heaven. I don't know where that comes from in the Bible. It's a nice idea but they obviously haven't listened to Jesus in this passage.

It's also hard to imagine in our sexualised world today that there will be no more sexual activity; there will be no need to have more children. Some people might say but that leaves

out one of the best things about life. Is God some sort of killjoy, spoilsport taking away things we enjoy.

Well, CS Lewis had a good explanation for this. He said, asking if there will be sexual activity in the future world is like the child who, on being told that sex was the greatest pleasure known to humans, assumed that people ate chocolates at the same time! They have no idea what the greatest pleasure could be – and neither do we when it comes to living with God. After all that God's given us and created for us does it fit in with his character that he would want to limit our pleasure. No, he has things which we wouldn't know how to enjoy now but we will know when we are changed completely and live with him. And it's not just sitting around playing harps all day in the clouds.

Ok, third thing, the Sadducees didn't really understand the Bible very well. They claimed to base themselves on the books of Moses – the first five books of the Bible, but they had missed the real message of the Bible. Israel's God was, and is, the creator of the world, but somehow he's content to describe himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, even though they died a long time ago.

When God introduced himself to Moses in Exodus 3:6 he said, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Not "I was..." but "I am". This is a continuing relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; it didn't finish years ago. It's a living relationship. God is holding them in life still, and one day they will be raised, along with all God's people, past, present and future, to enjoy the new world that God will make. He is the God of the living!

The great thing about this belief, as the Pharisees and Sadducees both knew, is that if we really believe this we become more ready to live for God right now, more eager to see God's promises of justice, peace and new life begin to take effect in our world now. The amazing thing is that when you come into God's kingdom you become one of the living – Paul says it's like you were dead before, but when you repent and accept the invitation of the king and come into his kingdom on his terms then you are made alive – you are someone who will live

forever. Look around you or look on your screen – the people you are sitting next to or looking at, if they have come into Jesus' kingdom, if they have repented and come into God's family – they will live forever with God. There WILL be a resurrection. And we WILL live forever with the God who loves us more than we could ever imagine. What a great truth to remember as we come near to Christmas again. As we think about God coming into the world as a little baby.

v. 34 – 40: Round 3 – back come the Pharisees. You can't fault them for trying. They're so determined to show Jesus up. Ok Jesus, they ask, what is the greatest commandment? The answer Jesus gives is a bit like last week's isn't it? Remember, Give back to God what is God's - how much should I give back to God? This much? This much? What is enough? There isn't a limit is there?

Well, it's the same here – there is no limit to how much you can love God or your neighbour. Sounds so simple. So easy? It would be so much easier if we just had to do certain things – you know wash my hands and feet and face; say some prayers; do the rituals – then I could do what ever else I wanted to do. But no, love the Lord your God, with ALL your heart, ALL your soul , ALL your mind. Every moment, every action, every day. That's one part of it. The other part is that I can't do it – some of the time yes, but there are still those areas of my life that remain tainted by my selfishness, or my fear, or my wanting to control things. Only God can help me to love God with ALL that I am. Let's not settle for less, brothers and sisters. But let's maintain the tension. We can't do this on our own; BUT we have a great God, a loving Father, who loves us as his children, and we have the Holy Spirit to give us the wisdom and the strength to be changing.

v. 41 – 46: And so we come to Round 4 – and the knockout punch. Here are the great teachers of the Law; the ones who were supposed to understand the Old Testament and explain it to others. Ok, Jesus says, "You've just asked me a question about the Old Testament, you know, what is the greatest commandment. Ok here's another one from the Old Testament – Psalm 110. Jesus asks them a question. Why does King David writing back 1000 years ago call the

messiah, “My Lord”, in other words David is saying that the Messiah is greater than he is. They’d never asked that question before, and they certainly didn’t know the answer, even though it was standing before them in flesh and blood.

After all of this, we have the same question in front of us. Is Jesus the Messiah come from God? is he the Son of God, sharing the throne with the Father and the Holy Spirit? Will we acknowledge him as Lord, just as David has acknowledged him as Lord?

What will this mean for us? It means we are called to repent, to turn around from the way we are going and go in God’s way; it means that we will want to give back to God all that we are (“Give back to God what is God’s”); it means that will want to love God with everything we are, in every moment of our lives and to love our neighbours as ourselves. It means we’re in a relationship with God, every moment , every day. We don’t just report in for a few minutes every day or once a week; we’re in a living relationship with God, as we wash the dishes, as we do some exercise, as we go to work, as we play with the kids, as we go to sleep, as we talk to our neighbours about Jesus, as we pray, as we love God and our neighbours – everything. So Jesus now asks his question – and this really is the important question, “What is your view of the Messiah?” They had the wrong idea of the Messiah – they’re looking for a conquering warrior king, like King David. Yes, he would be the Son of David, like David. Jesus goes to Scripture, to the Bible, again and reveals something to them that they had never realised. In Psalm 110 David speaks of the Messiah as Lord. In doing this he is saying that the Messiah must be more than just David’s physical descendent, who would be a national leader, greater perhaps than David himself.

Look at what Jesus says about Psalm 110. David writing the psalm says, in v. 44, “*The Lord*”, that is God, God says to my Lord, that is, to David’s Lord – what does God says to this person – “*Sit at my right hand*, in other words share power with me; “*until I put your enemies under your feet*”, that is, this person, David’s Lord, will rule over everything, alongside God.”

God will raise “David’s Lord” to his right hand to rule over everything. It’s clear. This Messiah is more than a descendant of David. The Messiah is also of divine origin. David’s son is also

David's God. Such a logical exposition of one of the key psalms reduced the Pharisees to silence. The Pharisees have no answer. But they will carry these words of Jesus over the next few days as they arrest him, they put him on trial and they crucify him. This is the Messiah standing right in front of them. He will show them what it means to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbour as yourself as he goes to the cross. When he rises from the dead he will show them that he is not the God of the dead but of the living.

One last thing, who are the *enemies* that are mentioned in Psalm 110 – Yes, Satan is certainly an enemy, but the key enemies Jesus is referring to are sin and death. These are the ultimate enemies of the human race, of us sitting here this morning. Jesus knows that the only way that sin and death can be defeated is if David's master, himself, God himself, goes to the cross and takes them on in single unarmed combat. So Jesus continues on his journey to the cross. My friends this is our God, this is Jesus. How can we do anything else but worship him, and serve him, with everything we are? This is our God, the servant King, he calls us now to follow him, to live our lives, under his rule, with everything we are and everything we have.

PRAY: Father, we thank you for sending Jesus into our world to die for us. Jesus, thank you for dying for us so that we might come into your kingdom. Holy Spirit, help us to listen to you and obey you as you work in us to change us.