

Pentecost 22 / 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Before Advent - 9<sup>th</sup> November 2025

Haggai 1: 15b-2: 9 – Psalm 98 – 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-5, 13-17 – Luke 20: 27-40

Three men were about to be executed by a firing squad. The first man was brought forward and before they could shoot him he yelled "avalanche"! The firing squad immediately panicked and in all the confusion, the man jumped over the wall and into freedom before they could regroup. The second man took note of what the first man did, and when he was brought forward for his execution, he yelled "earthquake"! Again, the firing squad panicked and in the ensuing confusion, the second man jumped over the same wall and into freedom too. The third man thought he saw the pattern, which was to yell out some disaster and then immediately jump over the wall. So when he was finally brought forward, he confidently yelled "fire"!

Often there can be parts of the biblical texts which can be, if not conflicting, then most definitely confusing. Which in turn to lead to making mistakes when it comes to interpreting and applying scripture. It was one of the reasons that the pre-Reformation universal or Catholic church only allowed holy scripture to be read and preached in Latin. Because, and rightly so as it has transpired, once scripture became available in the vernacular languages of other nations and peoples within the Holy Roman Empire, it would eventually be open to a myriad of never-ending interpretations and errors. Which in many respects, is why the Reformation has never really ended and will most likely continue one way or another until our Lord's return. Because everybody will have their own interpretation/s and applications of scripture to their spiritual lives.

For example, the texts chosen by the Sadducees when they are finally named as a distinct entity who engaged Jesus for the first and only time as recorded in Luke. Though they would have also been included with the chief priests who had earlier been amongst those who'd challenged Jesus' authority (Luke 20:1-2). Not only to question Jesus' overall authority, but more specifically derived from the Sadducee's understanding of the reality of a spiritual afterlife, and in particular resurrection of the human body, which by the time of 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish religious life, was a highly accepted and respected belief.

Ordinarily the practice of "knowing" or living intimately with an immediate family was taboo, which also included that of a man's brother's wife or sister-in-law. This was a Mosaic or Written or Levitical law which is located in the Torah or first five books of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament (Leviticus 18:16-17). However, with one exception, again according to another Mosaic/Levitical law, and again in the context of marriage. Which explained that if two brothers lived under the same roof, and the older brother was married and yet perished without issue or children, then the remaining younger brother was obliged to marry his older brother's widow, so as to beget children and so honour his older brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). King Henry VIII actually used this very text to validate his marriage to his older brother Arthur's widow Catherine, though he reverted to the prior when he couldn't secure a male heir. Nonetheless, it was upon this later premise or text from Deuteronomy, that the Sadducees approached Jesus. Whether it was actually still practiced by that time or not, which it most likely wasn't.

Our Lord was of course finally in Jerusalem for the last time, and as above, He had just experienced another negative encounter with the Scribes, Elders, and Chief Priests. Sometimes it's easy to forget that the Pharisees and Sadducees actually formed two very different and distinct groups. Even though they made up most of the religious elite that had come to be well entrenched in 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish religious, political, and cultural life. Both groups were also heavily represented in the overall governing body of the time which was known as the Sanhedrin. Pharisees for the most part were either teachers of the law and/or elders, lawyers or Scribes, or just plain Pharisees. Most of whom were members of a trade or part of the merchant class, or who earned an income outside of their Pharisaic duties. And who were supposedly not ever politically or financially ambitious. They believed in and adhered to all the Mosaic/Levitical Law (the Torah), plus all the subsequent oral or scribal laws, of which there were thousands. They also believed in the coming messiah, afterlife, resurrection from the dead, and spiritual beings like angels and demons.

Sadducees on the other hand came mostly from the priestly and/or aristocratic classes. In other words, they were the top dogs within the Sanhedrin, as well as definitely being the more politically and financially astute and ambitious. The only OT texts they accepted as authoritative were the Torah or first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which is why they refused to believe in a messiah, afterlife or resurrection, and therefore any spiritual entities or reality whatsoever. Their main concern was to ensure that the corrupt system which favoured their collaborationist relationship with Rome continued unabated. Especially when it came to quashing anything that threatened such harmony of imbued wealth, prestige, and comfort, like insurgency or insurrection. Which is why of all the religious groups within Jewish society of the period, they had most to lose and therefore a much larger invested interest in getting rid of Jesus, permanently.

Whilst overall this was most likely why the Sadducees threw the ridiculous scenario regarding the bride or widow and seven brothers who apparently all lived under the same roof at Jesus, it was also no doubt based on their complete disregard for a spiritual afterlife. Not only to emphasize for them how absurdly inconceivable an afterlife was, especially as they believed there was no direct reference to as much in the Torah, but perhaps more so, to trap Jesus out as all along being yet one more seditious troublemaking sophist.

Interestingly, our Lord used the very texts in which they held precious to counter their belief. That if God is alive (Deuteronomy 4:4) because God is the God of the living, and at the same time, still the God of their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:1-6), then by reason, these same three ancestors could not possibly be dead, but in reality, must still be alive. In an afterlife. Which means there has to be a resurrection of all human bodies after all. Whether this was enough to convince the cynical Sadducees, we are not told. Though it was met with favour from some nearby Scribes, who were most likely also Pharisees, and enough to finally stop once and for all, anyone from questioning of Jesus' authority.

Jesus' reply also shed light on the reality of what the resurrection spiritual afterlife reality would be like too. Which is that in the new heaven, we will all exist like angels. And that being asexual spiritual entities, as apparently angels are, there will be no sexual or conjugal relationships either. We may wonder if as many hope or believe, that when we get to heaven we will resume being attached to those with whom we were married in this life. Judging by what our Lord says, then probably no. Which may or may not be a relief to those wondering. But in Jesus' day, and no doubt since, this had the effect of highlighting, especially for women, that in the afterlife they would no longer be the property of any man as they may have been, especially in those times. But instead free to be who they would be as equal children and heirs of the living God. Additionally for the Jews, the concept of an afterlife also helped to explain away the injustices and unfulfilled promises of God's people one day being restored in glory with their God. Particularly in light of perpetually coming under Gentile oppression and subjugation, even after their exile in Babylon.

Both the post-exilic prophet Haggai and much later Paul had similarly encouraging and yet restorative words for their different audiences also. Haggai's message for the despairing remnant left behind to dwell in a desecrated Jerusalem after it had been ransacked and most had been taken into exile by the Babylonians. That they don't lose heart, for God's promises of a rebuilt Jerusalem and Temple will come to pass, aided by those soon to return from exile. Spiritually alluding to an almost end time, resurrection of the eternal with the coming of the Messiah. The second coming or return of whom, Paul was attempting to reinforce against confusing misconceptions circling within the Thessalonian church, that the Lord had already returned.

As God's heirs, it is imperative we keep holding fast to the eternal truth, that all of us as believers will one day be resurrected into our new imperishable and immortal bodies, just as our Lord was Himself resurrected. And that whilst experiencing the challenges and trials that invariably arise, we can still trust that whilst we may vacillate at times in our faith in Christ, our Lord, who is always true to His promises never will. Trusting He will return and restore us with fullness and life back with Him. No confusion. No mistake.

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