

One Bride, Seven Brothers!

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[0 : 00] Now I want us to look for a while at the chapter, the passage in the chapter that includes the quote from that Psalm that we've just been singing.

It's Luke chapter 20 and the passage we read from verse 27 to the end of the chapter. Now I have to say that the more that I go on in life, the less that I know.

I'm in that strange kind of middle area between youth and old age. Some of you might doubt that or might question that, but that's where I feel that I am anyway.

And I've lost the certainty and the confidence of youth. And because of that I've become more cynical, more cynical of myself and also more cynical of my fellow human beings, which is sad in many ways.

But having experienced our capacity to blow it so often, I have that cynicism. And also maybe a bit cynical of new things and new ideas and new concepts, maybe especially related to theology and spirituality.

[1 : 26] I smile more when I read in Ecclesiastes there is nothing new under the sun and realise that God knows all things. But paradoxically as well, I think in this little autobiographical sketch that I'm more childlike in my character and in my trust of Jesus.

And I'm more willing now to learn of Jesus Christ, I think, and be surprised by Him than ever before. And along with that cynicism goes a newer appreciation of the beauty that I see in this world, even in its brokenness, even in the things that have gone wrong, and in the way that we've turned against God and all His ways, still see His beauty.

So I find that there's this constant tension, and I hope it's a healthy tension, between having a childlike trust in Jesus Christ, which requires a great deal of humility and ongoing self-examination, which deals with my preconceptions and my presuppositions, and yet draws me closer to Him.

And that tension is very much part of our Christian lives. It can be uncomfortable, but at the same time is redeeming, and there's a great power in that.

And that tension of dealing with our pride all the time comes across very strongly in this passage, and the tensions in this passage are very real.

[3 : 17] And that Jesus unfolds Himself very powerfully again in this passage, and I hope to examine that and look at that a little bit today, because we see human pride, and pride in many ways is the focus of our thoughts today.

Pride, human pride is encapsulated very powerfully in the two groups that come and meet with Jesus, that Jesus interacts with in this passage.

There are the Sadducees, and there's the teachers of the Laws, they're called, in this passage. And firstly we have the questioning Sadducees, who come to Jesus in the first section, which is entitled, The Resurrection and Marriage, and they ask Him about the resurrection in the context of marriage.

There's a strange group of people, the Sadducees, they're a real bizarre bunch, I don't know much about them, and not many of the commentators seem to know much about the Sadducees either.

I don't know how you would describe them, secular believers, I don't know, but they were a strange bunch, they were kind of elitist, they were usually quite rich, they were arrogant, they were exclusivist, they didn't even like the Pharisees or any of the other groups of people that made themselves known in Jesus' time.

[4 : 44] They believed only in Moses' Law or Moses' Books, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, they didn't have any time for any other parts of the Bible, as it was then, the Old Testament, and they didn't believe in the resurrection, they didn't believe in the resurrection of the body or of the soul.

So I don't really know what they believed, what did they believe? I think that somehow God blessed them in this life if they obeyed the Ten Commandments, but then they reckoned God didn't interfere in their lives, so I can't really find out anywhere much about the Sadducees, they're a bizarre bunch of people.

But anyway, they come to Jesus with a great deal of pride and they set up this straw man, or maybe seven straw men, in the story, because they speak about a potential situation that might arise with regard to the Levirate Law of marriage, which was in the Jewish times that if a man married a woman and man died, and there was no children in order to keep his name and his seed going, that the brother would marry the wife, the widow and so on and so on.

So we've got this kind of bizarre and ludicrous picture being brought up of seven brothers for one bride. And it's not a genuine question, it's not a searching question, it's not a real question, it's an arrogant question.

These people are superior, it's a mocking question. They want to put Christ in their place, they want to make out and expose the stupidity of the concept and the theology of the resurrection.

[6 : 23] They were wanting to confirm their own unbelief in such a ludicrous doctrine, and so they ask a stupid question. They ask a smart Alec question, I guess, is how we would put it today.

They want their construction of life and of the future and of their idea of the universe to be confirmed by this, the inability of Jesus to answer the question, and so it will bring them comfort and self-assurance and will confirm their own beliefs.

They have no time for Christ, no time for his lordship, and so they ask this rather bizarre question. They want to trip him up.

I will look at Jesus' answer in a minute. That's the first group of people, proud in their own position, their own belief, their own belief system, their own construct of the universe that doesn't require them to change or be challenged or be moved in any way whatsoever.

Then we come to the other group of people who are mentioned twice in this passage, the teachers of the law. Jesus having given his answer to the Sadducees, they come into the equation and they say, Oh, well said teacher, well done Jesus.

[7 : 44] Again, they come with an amazing degree, I think, I don't know how it would look in the Greek, but in the English it comes across well as a condescending answer that they give to him.

Well said teacher, damn him with faint praise. And when it suited them, these teachers of the law, when it suited their own particular niche theology, then they were happy to make their agreement with Jesus.

Again, it wasn't the agreement of those who come submissively to a god, to a lord, to a teacher who they respect or admire, but again, they're just pleased that he's got one over the Sadducees because they don't like the Sadducees because they don't believe in the resurrection.

So there's a, again, it's a comfort that they have, that their own position, their own beliefs are being confirmed here and they are happy with that.

It's interesting, at this point they have conveniently forgotten many of the other teachings of Jesus which are a challenge to them and many other of the sayings of Jesus which were a direct judgment on them.

[8 : 56] Well said teacher. So we have the Sadducees and we also have the teachers of the law and they were the ones who were standing in judgment on Jesus.

They were the ones who were coming to trip Jesus up. They were the ones who were asking questions of Jesus. They had no interest in Passion Week. They had no interest in Jesus who was working his way towards the cross.

They were wanting him to confirm their own ideas. They were wanting him to justify himself by answering their questions to their agenda and their time.

We see the teachers of the law have done that often in the past, trying to ask questions of Jesus to trip him up. And so we have this kind of encapsulation of human pride here in connection or in conversation with Jesus.

And I do wonder if we've changed that much, you know, if humanity has changed that much, but we're still proud in that kind of way where we are the ones who stand in judgment on Jesus so much of the time.

[10 : 16] We're the ones who demand the answers from Jesus to our agenda. I'm not talking about asking questions to know him better and to understand his character more.

Questions rather to keep him at bay. That's the kind of questions they were asking. Questions that would keep him away, keep him at bay, that would confirm their own prejudices or their own particular set of beliefs.

Is it that we often come to Jesus Christ with the pride of our own closed system of thinking and of belief or of unbelief?

Or we see him in the same way maybe that the teachers of the law see it, so I'm here as a kind of pick and mix teacher. Oh, they liked what he said about the resurrection. Well said, Jesus.

But they were so keen on what he said about oppression of the poor or what he said about turning God's house into a den of robbers. Didn't like that kind of thing. So it's a pick and mix kind of Jesus that they are thinking about.

[11 : 22] And we can in our pride do the same thing. Why, I like that. That fits in with my own system of belief. And I'll pat Jesus on the back for that. But that's as far as we take him.

As long as he comforts us, as long as he comforts our belief system, our thinking, our attitudes, then we're quite content to have him close or far away depending on where we are.

If we have no cognisance in our lives of the danger of pride, and I think we're in an unhealthy place spiritually. Pride is a really, it's a really terrible thing in our lives.

I'm not meaning to show the outward obvious pride, but the gentle, quiet pride that will keep Christ at bay and that will say, well, that's far and no further.

And will not allow him his lordship, which the Sam was speaking about, which Christ goes on to speak about. It's that tension, isn't it?

[12 : 33] That I was speaking about the beginning, about myself. It's the tension of having a child-like faith, as we go on in life, that is willing to learn and willing to allow Jesus to speak and be Lord.

That is humble and learning to be humble. As opposed to a childish faith, two are different. There's a child-like faith and there's a childish faith that comes to Jesus with all the answers.

It says that, I know, and that Jesus, what is he doing now? He's slayed me down the wrong direction. What else is he playing at? Which is a proud thing. A childish faith is a proud faith.

Child-like faith is a humble faith. And that tension remains in our life all the time. As believers, we face that struggle all the time. To not have a childish but a child-like faith.

So pride is a big issue that's been dealt with in this passage. What about Jesus? How does Jesus respond to these two groups of people? And how can that response challenge us in our understanding of Jesus for ourselves?

[13 : 46] Well, rather than start at the beginning of the section, I'm going to go right into the middle of the section, which is from section verse 41 to 44. And what we see there, as Colin rightly stated before we sung this, Sam, Jesus, what does he do?

He asks questions. He's the one that asks questions. There's an immediate paradox, or there's an immediate turnaround there. Because he's been faced, all of his public ministry, by people coming up to him and asking questions to try and trip him up, to try and make him show his teaching to be false, and to do all these kind of things from a position of authority or arrogance.

And yet he comes here right in the middle, and he's the one from the throne, as it were, who asks his questions. He's supremely confident in his word, in scripture, in the Sam 110 that we were singing.

And he encourages these guys, these Sadducees, these teachers of the law, and ourselves, to search their own scriptures. Sam 110 would have been known by these people, particularly the teachers of the law, to be messianic.

So he asks them questions as Lord and God, and he says, how is it that they say, the Christ, the Son of David, is the Son of David, where David himself declares in the book of Psalms, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

[15 : 20] David calls him Lord, how then can he be his son? He's asking them questions about what they reckon they already know about the Messiah, that he is Lord.

But yet genealogically he's a son of David. And that he is worthy of worship, that he is facing an enemy that he will one day very soon defeat, and he will be on the throne of God.

He is slowly unpacking, but in a very gentle way, by asking questions himself, a self revelation of God, the Son, on his way to the cross.

It's role reversal, isn't it? He's spent a lot of time answering the questions of those who in superiority and in arrogance try to trip him up.

And here is the one, as the living God, who is asking the questions. And Jesus often does that in Scripture. He often does that in the Bible.

[16 : 25] And these questions remain very powerful for us. You know, what does the Bible say? Thousands of years before I was born, what does it say about me, about being fully God, fully human?

What does it say about sacrifice? What does it say about atonement? But Jesus often in his day to day living asks questions, who do you say that I am? Do you love me?

What are you doing here? Ordinary questions. He asks the questions, because he is Lord, because he is God, and he is the right to ask these questions.

And that's sometimes what we need more of, isn't it? We want God to come to us through his word and for his word to unseat us with its questions.

What do you believe? Why are you living the way you're living? What will you do with the God who reveals himself in this way? Because he wants to unseat sometimes the comfort and the ease and the lordship that we have taken in his place.

[17 : 32] He wants to challenge us. He wants us to search for answers. He wants us to take his word and be challenged by his word and by his claims.

And I hope that that is the attitude with which we come to worship and with which we come to his word, that we allow his word to appear into our hearts and challenge us to make us think.

He is the one who has the right and the authority and the position to ask questions. But he also speaks, not just, he doesn't only ask questions, he also speaks with absolute authority.

In verses 34 to 38, in answer to the Sadducees' mocking question about seven bridegrooms for one bride, he speaks with absolute authority.

He also uses the Pentateuchal Scriptures and speaks about Moses using their own Scripture that they believed in to answer their question. But you know what he does?

[18 : 35] He simply declares the resurrection to be true. We don't have a 50-page thesis on the metaphysical realities of whether resurrection can happen or not.

He simply declares it with outstanding authority. If you know something to be true, there is an ease with which you can share that and which you can tell it.

You know that confidence you have when you know something to be true, when you've met someone or you've been somewhere and you've experienced something, and you can just share that.

Even with people who don't believe or who are cynical, you can just say, Look, I was there, or I've done that, I've been there. And there's a great assurance. That's the kind of way that Jesus speaks about the resurrection.

He simply states it. He doesn't make any kind of powerful construction to defend it. He says there's this age where people are given a marriage, then there's the age to come.

[19 : 38] And marriage wouldn't be part of that. He says they're different ages. The whole marriage question he dismisses as a non-secretary. It's just not an issue. Different ages.

Different times, different world. It'll be God's home. It'll be God's community. We'll not need to reproduce. We'll not need to have marriage in that form. We will be with God in God's completed family.

He simply states the reality of life after death. Clearly. And he says that those who will be there will be those who are considered worthy of being there.

I think that's a very interesting, small statement that Jesus makes there. He doesn't say much. He doesn't say who isn't.

But these guys on either side of him, the Sadducees and the teachers of the law, they undoubtedly felt themselves to be worthy of God. And worthy of any of God's blessings, even though the Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection, they still believed themselves to be those who were worthy.

[20 : 53] And yet we know in this passion week that Jesus was going to die on the cross in order to make a people who were worthy.

That was the good news that he came with. And that he came to deal with and he came to prepare a place for those who would trust in him. He came to defeat death and pride and sin and our separation to reveal his love and his grace in our place so that those who trust in him with a childlike faith can be covered, not in their own worth, but in his worthiness.

And these will be those who have a place in this resurrection. We'll hide in him. And the more that I go on, the more I see the completeness of what Jesus has come to do.

He is the sum of all our questions, of all your search for meaning and for direction and for love and for belonging and for purpose and for joy and for hope and for laughter and for blessing.

It struck me very strongly this last week on holiday I'd try and spend some time just reading different kind of books. Not theology books, but just different kind of books.

[22 : 19] And they're two very different books, but both in their own way spoke very powerfully to me about the hope of the Gospel. People are searching for in their different ways and people have asked questions about it and people are looking for answers in these same issues.

When we actually allow ourselves to think beyond these tenders and kind of everyday things of life, into the deep things of living and meaning. And one was George Best's book called Blessed, the most misnamed book in all time, because it's a bleak and empty book of slavery and of despair and of abandonment.

And also Barack Obama's book about his childhood and his search and his meaning and his purpose.

And having heard a sermon, and it's not this book, but having heard a sermon about the audacity of hope, how strongly that struck with him. And these are everyday concepts that people are looking for satisfaction in different areas.

And the more that I go on, the more that my faith looks to Jesus, and the more that Jesus reveals himself, we see that all of these concepts, constructs, are found fulfillment in him.

[23 : 46] He is the meaning and the purpose. And we find in him all that we are looking for in life and indeed for eternity.

As he becomes our Lord. As we see him as worthy of our worship. Absolute authority, he speaks very unpleasant today to speak in such absolute terms.

But is he the authority of the Lord, or the authority of a madman, you decide. So he speaks with absolute authority. And he also speaks with stunning insight.

Stunning insight. The last section, verses 41 to 47, where he speaks about the Psalm and asks the questions.

And then he goes on to speak about the teachers of the law and says, beware of the teachers of the law. Remember they've said, well said teacher. They've given him this amazing praise.

[24 : 51] He doesn't respond with saying, oh thanks very much. I'm pleased that you realize that my teaching agrees with yours. He doesn't say that. He has stunning insight.

He's not flattered in any way by them. He's really strong and he says, look beware of them. Beware because they like to walk with flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and of the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour of banquets.

They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayer such men will be punished most severely. He exposes them utterly, shockingly for their pride.

For their selfish desire for popularity, for their intellectual snobbery, for their love of first place, for their abuse of the vulnerable, for their false spirituality, their love of money.

It's painful. It's stinging. It's powerful words. And again he speaks of the future.

[25 : 54] Previously he speaks of the resurrection. Here he speaks of judgment. Some men, such men will be punished most severely. Condemnation. That's not what we want to hear.

We don't want to hear that. But he's making clear here to those and to us that there's one throne. There is one judgment.

And that he exposes powerfully the intents and the motives of our hearts. She's beyond the clothes. She's beyond the popularity.

She's beyond the intellect and the gifts and all that we have. And exposes our hearts. And it's pride he's dealing with again. And he says that that will be held to account.

That those who will know and enjoy the worthiness of glory and of heaven will be those who come to him with a childlike faith in humility.

[26 : 53] And who trust in what he has done and he has finished for them in the cross and all his love. And Jesus says here, as he says in other places, that those who have the positions of privilege are those who need to be very, very careful that they're not abusing that position.

So ministers here, myself, James and others, who are studying for ministry, need to consider that very carefully. In James chapter 3, one he says those who are teachers, leaders, will be judged more strictly.

Very solemn reality for us, not to abuse the privilege we have of looking at God's word and studying God's word and preaching God's word and sharing God's word, not to be hypocritical, not to be proud, not to be arrogant, not to stand in judgment over it, but to come in humbly like children.

But it's also a reminder to us that God is the one who's on the throne. Christ is the one who's worthy of our worship today, and Christ is the one who makes judgment.

It's not about our comparison with other people, how good or bad we feel compared to them. It's not about how innocent or guilty we are in other people's eyes. It's not about our religious observance, is it?

[28 : 17] We go into church. It's not about our popularity. It's not about our wealth. It's about our power. The key issue that Jesus is focusing on more and more and more as He heads towards the cross is what do you think of me, Jesus? What do we think of Christ?

If we proudly make judgment on Him and think, it's not for me, I don't need Him, then that's our choice, but He says that we are to make Him our Lord.

Because if we don't make Him our Lord, if we don't give Him His rightful place as Lord and God and King and Savior and lover of our soul, then we are as well just walking the rest of the way towards Calvary and joining in the crowd that will out-crucify Him in a few more chapters.

He spiritually exposes the need of our heart to healing and to humbling and to His love and His grace and His fantastic concern for our souls that would take Him to the cross for us.

Life is very short, you know, and here Jesus again says to us, and if you go back to John 11, 25, He says, I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who comes to me will live even though he dies.

[29 : 44] That's the invitation. That's the reality. He speaks as one who knows about a future, a bodily resurrection and a resurrection of our souls to go into that age to come, either an age of blessing and joy or of judgment and condemnation.

Put your trust in Jesus, and in a new way, and each of us as believers can do that, in a new way to renew our trust and our belief in Jesus and our faith that He is real, and He is living, and He is powerful, and He is alive.

Because we worship Him on this resurrection morning, on the morning of the first day of the week. Let us pray. Lord God, we ask and pray that You would help us to know You and understand You and love You and be led by You and find that our own constructs and our own understandings will sometimes be deeply shattered and challenged, and what we hear from others and what we may be grown up with will be challenged.

Because Jesus is living and vibrant and fresh and is God, and we can never know all there is to know about You. May we be surprised by joy, may we be amazed by Your condescending love, may we find in humility great courage and strength, may we find and understand and know the cancer of pride and the imprisonment that it brings to us and the smallness that it makes our lives, that we shrink rather than grow and expand, and may we allow You to lead us into new pastures and to learn new things and to be excited by new realities.

So even though unlike the Sadducees, or like the Sadducees, we can't see the future and we can't see the spiritual realms and therefore they didn't believe them, may we rather be like those who follow Jesus, who recognise His authority having come from spiritual realms, having existed eternally and exists eternally, and returns to these spiritual realms, may we recognise and know all His truth as truth, and may we look forward to that resurrection, not just of soul, of body, but of amazing reality of a new heavens and a new earth, where in dwelleth righteousness.

[32 : 31] So help us, we pray, give us courage and belief and trust in You, and may we want to share You with those who we know, who are looking and searching for all that Christ offers and may be looking in different places.

So we pray that Jesus will be real to each and every one of us today, as we worship and praise, where we ask it in His precious name. Amen.