

## **TAKING THE TEST** (10<sup>th</sup> November 2019 Lindfield)

### **LUKE 20: 27-38**

If any of you have been students or teachers chances are both groups find the same aspect of education the most difficult – and that is testing – exams and quizzes. The student may find actually taking the test the most difficult whereas the teacher might find setting the test the most challenging. What do I ask to ensure I find out how much the student knows and how they can adapt their knowledge to various situations. It takes real skill to test for knowledge. This is because one of the most difficult parts about testing is that behind every test there is the assumed world of the question.

This is best amplified when an astronomy professor asked his students in their final exam, “Name three things that occur on the earth but not on the moon.” I assume she was seeking some geological or physical phenomena such as gravity. One student answered, “ Roller skating, Bruce Springsteen and the Republican Party”. See? Behind every question there is the assumed world of the questioner. The student was perfectly correct. The question was not specific enough.

The right question is illustrated by famous chemistry Professor from Duke University, Dr Bonk. The night before the Chemistry exam three students went out partying and didn't turn up in time to take the test. They explained to Dr Bonk that they left in plenty of time but had a flat tyre and there was no spare so it took such a long time to get the tyre fixed which is why they were late. The professor was unusually sympathetic and understanding. He agreed they could take the test the next day. When they turned up they saw only one question on the paper: “Which tyre was flat?”

Jesus faced a similar sort of exam from the Sadducees. “There was a woman who got married. Her husband died. In accordance with the Levite Law she was given in marriage to her husband's brother. Unfortunately he, too, died so she was given to the next brother. He too died and she was given to the next brother and so on. Here's the exam question: Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?”

Seven weddings. Seven funerals. Answer one: In the next life she can't be married to brother number one because she's been married to brother number two. Answer two: She can't be married to all of the brothers at the one time.

Luke puts the question in context for us as the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. It's a trick question. You can't be married to every husband therefore the resurrection of the dead is a stupid idea.

Jesus gives answer number three. One they were clearly not expecting. Jesus is working from a different world view to them. He replies, “People who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage but in the age to come, the resurrection age, people won't marry or be given in marriage. They can no longer die because they are like the angels and are God's children since they share in the resurrection. He isn't the God of the dead but of the living.” (Luke 20:34-36, 38)

Jesus' critics were working out of an old world view, a world of unjust relationships and much sadness. The poor woman. Not a single thought to her situation. It was as though they were talking about a piece of livestock being handed down from one to the other.

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Jesus is saying the resurrection is not just some extension of our world. It is a whole new world. The world as God intended it to be. The woman is a child if God not a piece of property.

Even we are slow to pick up on this. We think of our future, we tend to think on the basis of our past. What happened yesterday, will happen tomorrow only hopefully a bit better, a bit closer to God's ideal. But God's world is something that God creates, a place where God's children live unencumbered by sin, suffering and death. We do not dare imagine a life entirely as God intended. It's too different, too fanciful. When the Book of Revelation speaks of the age to come it uses the imagery of the Garden of Eden. It does so because that is our best way of understanding the ideal. The Bible begins with God in the Garden, viewing a perfect creation which He declares to be "very good". The Bible ends with a picture of the new creation: a new heaven and a new earth. Just like Eden, it is entirely as God intended.

There is the story of a lovely Christian couple who had a son who spent much of his adult life in jail. The couple had deep regret wondering if they had contributed to his wayward life. Then the news came that their son had been killed in a fight in the jail. At the funeral there was much sadness. "What a waste" thought many.

At the cemetery his mother confided, "At last he is at peace. For maybe the only time in his life, he is at peace. Now God can begin again with him. God can make up for our parental mistakes. God who gave him to us now has him for his own."

In this age ....in the age to come, therein is our hope.

AMEN

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