

## Second Coming – Remembering the Future

What ought we to remember on remembrance day today ? We best honour the memory of those who have suffered and died in war, by remembering not the past – but by remembering the future.

Yes look back upon the horrific tragedies of the second world war, and we remind ourselves that we must never let this happen again. Never again must we see the deaths of so many innocent people, never again must we see ethnicity specific extermination, never again must we see rows of... And hallelujah – we have succeeded. We do not see those atrocities in our world today – but of course, the tragedy is that our refusal to see these things, does not mean that they are not happening :

The death tolls of ... - What ought we to remember on remembrance day? The Readings for this morning seem to point us forwards as well as backwards. Our attention is shifted to the so-called second coming of Christ. So a lot of people have a lot to say about the second coming -

*If Jesus Christ were to return to earth and the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit were to slay the greater part of mankind, the first thing the media would do would be to find out how the markets had reacted. The next would be to ring Sir Digby Jones, the head of the Confederation of British Industry, for a comment.*

On the one hand, there are those for whom it is bad news, and then there are those for whom it is good:

When I was growing up, there was a resounding phrase in my household – where there were 4 children and only one mother. It was this – ‘you wait till your Father gets home’. When it was said in that kind of a tone – my dad’s arrival through the front door was not really something to look forward to. On the other – there were several times when my parents had quite simply run out of money – when there was no food in the house, and – I remember we laughed about it at the time but sounds archaic today – we literally could not eat until my dad arrived home with this month’s pay. Then, the return of my Father was definitely something we were longing for. In Jesus day, there were those for whom the return of Christ was welcome, and those for whom it was not.

The Pharisees, having no power belonged to the group who would welcome such a visitation. The Sadducees, with power and money and land and influence, would not. So they ridiculed belief in the resurrection, as in any kind of after life.

### Scripture

Here we are near to the heart of Jesus’ debate with the Sadducees. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection – and this was not because they were sensible, liberal, thinkers. Far from it, it was because they were, in reality, ultra-conservative. They had power, and

money and influence with the occupying power. They were quite happy with the way things are thank you very much.

They were like the cow out of the film Babe. The poor old duck, is trying to become a rooster – giving him a practical job that will enable him to avoid the fate of the duck, which is to achieve the comfort of the human farmhouse only as part of a human meal. Well, the duck witnesses a friend being eaten and expresses his horror. And the cow responds by saying that the only way the duck will find happiness is by accepting that the way things are is the way things are. In a brilliant move of existential outburst, the duck responds – ‘the way things are stinks’.

The duck would have had many allies in ancient Palestine. But the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection because they were happy with the way things are. They were conservative, so they mock Jesus with one of the kind of stories they used to use, about the ridiculous scenario of a wife outliving seven brothers and remaining husbandless – whose husband will she be?

For those who lived in Jesus’ day, the resurrection was part of a new age where the present unjust order of society would be displaced by true justice. It was not some state of disembodied bliss, but an actual new life. But Jesus suggests that it is something more. And he does this – not by going to the prophets that seem to speak explicitly about resurrection - but by quoting from the only books that the ultra conservative Sadducees recognised. The law books of Moses, the first five books of our modern bible. And he speaks of the burning bush, and of God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Does that look to you as though it’s talking about resurrection? God is not the God of the dead, he says, but of the living because to him, all of them are alive, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all the prophets and righteous men and women of old. This is a puzzle because this looks to us as though he’s talking about the survival of the disembodied soul, not about the resurrection of the body.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob haven’t been yet raised from the dead — they certainly hadn’t been in Jesus’ day. So how could demonstrating that they were alive to God at the time of Moses prove the resurrection? Doesn’t it simply prove a continuing existence after death? Well, you could read it that way but in fact no first-century Jew would have thought that that was the point. The Sadducees denied not only bodily resurrection but any kind of a future life. They seemed to have thought that death really was the end — the only kind of life you’d have would be in the blessed memory of those who had known and loved and respected you.

Within the mainstream Jewish worldview, we can see the point because Jews believed and believe — and sometimes they put us Christians to shame in this — that life, bodily life, life on this good earth, was God’s gift. They weren’t Platonists who thought that the world was a dark and awful place and the best thing to do was to escape it as soon possible. No, if people still existed somewhere within the love and care of God after death, it could only be because God was going to make a new world and give them new bodies to live within that new world. Resurrection was never a general term for life after death. It was always a term for a newly embodied life, after life, after death, whatever that might be.

## **Ethics**

Well, the modern world is one of tidy compartments – where the world is separated into manageable sections that must not overstep their boundaries:

God is upstairs and we are down. So don't have any silly beliefs about God intervening in human history. That's just **the way things are**.  
Politics is public, religion is private.

But on remembrance Day, we align ourselves with the duck and say that **the way things are stinks**.

Being open means accepting in our private lives

Sadducees – resurrection is bad news, if the way things are stinks – then it is good news. And surprise surprise – who is it that Jesus chooses to live? Those who believe that the way things are stinks! But the way of Jesus is not the way of the zealot.

Markets - disruption