

LUKE 20:27-40
MISSING THE BIG PICTURE

These two men have made their fortune out of trivia. Their names are Scott Abbott and Chris Haney and they are the inventors of *Trivial Pursuit*. The game was created in 1979 and swept the world. There are all kinds of editions of the game now and all it is all about trivial things you never thought you'd remember. In the original edition there are questions about Science and nature, Sport and leisure, Arts and literature, History, geography and entertainment; you have to go around the board answering questions and collecting coloured sections of your playing piece, one representing each colour and each of these six subjects. So, what is capital of Iraq? Who invited you to *Double your money*? On which island did Napoleon die? What race of warriors burned off their right breast in Greek legend? Which line divides a circle into two semicircles? And what colour is the bullseye on an official archery target? Answers later, if you want!

Some people just have minds that remember all kinds of trivia; they tell you all kinds of details about events or occasions or books or TV programmes, and can quote you the script, or they can sing along to the words of songs on the radio and their minds simply absorb all of that kind of trivia and so are a genius to have on your team when it comes to *Trivial Pursuit*. Apart from the game, however, there is a danger in trivia. For some people it is a debating tactic, to concentrate on trivial points in order to make the case they oppose seem stupid; or they concentrate on trivia because they need to make sure that every 'i' is dotted and every 't' is crossed before they'll sign up to the deal. The danger in seeing only small things, (and it is a value judgment to call them trivial things) is that we miss the big picture of something much more important and significant.

That is the case with the question that the Sadducees asked Jesus during Easter week in Jerusalem. Other people have asked their questions, now it is their turn. We don't know much about the Sadducees except what we read in the gospels, and that's all fairly negative. They appear to have been something akin to Jewish aristocracy; most of their followers were well-to-do. Every member of the Sadducee group was a priest in the temple, so they had a huge amount of religious influence. They were ready to co-operate with the Romans which co-operation allowed them to keep their privileged position. They were essentially conservative in their religion and above all we know about them they rejected any notion of 'resurrection', a new-fangled idea (they thought) and so it was rejected.

Their question was designed to show how stupid and silly the idea of resurrection really was. So they try to ridicule the idea by devising such a convoluted and trivial question. It was a Bible-based question: "*Teacher...*" (v28) True, there was a law in Deuteronomy 25 to that effect; the Old Testament saw that keeping the name alive was important and so it was designed to keep alive the name of the man who had died through giving him some kind of heir by proxy. Actually there are not many, if any, examples of this happening and by New Testament times the practice had fallen into disuse anyway, so the question is entirely an academic one, but the Sadducees take it to another level: "*Now there...*" (v29ff) Then comes the crunch question: "*Now then...*" (v33) "So, Jesus; answer that one, if you can, please; give us the benefit of your wisdom; it's such a conundrum isn't it!" They are not trying to undermine the law, but they are trying to trick Jesus and to make people see how silly the idea of resurrection is!

This kind of thing still happens; it is a debating technique. If you listen to any atheist arguments about Christianity, they tend to focus on the idea of creation and evolution

and the Bible and those who are trying to discredit the Bible's view will bring up all kinds of small points and issues about the world we live in and how it is this and it is that and if this is true, how can it be true that God created the world and how can you believe that God created the world etc etc! The argument is designed to make any idea of God and creation seem so ludicrous that no-one with an ounce of common sense would believe it. They are certainly not looking for answers to their questions, but are trying to score debating points. By the way, the Bible declares its faith in God as creator and Genesis 1 is a celebration of God as the creator of everything, but that is shouted down by those who want to ridicule it!

So the Sadducees try to ridicule the idea of resurrection in general and perhaps in particular Jesus' promise that He will rise again. "it is a silly idea". So Jesus' counter: "You quote the Bible at me, but you don't really know the Bible; you do not really know the whole Bible's message! You're missing the big picture here!" Jesus tells us two things: 1) what resurrection means; 2) what God is like!

1. what resurrection means: "*the people...*" (v34f) To make fun of resurrection they depicted it as just the same as this life here and now; any kind of future life will simply be a continuation of what we have here and now. So the issues we face here and now, like marriage, will simply carry on into resurrection life; so it will matter hugely which man is the real husband to this woman; so how silly is that! Jesus says resurrection life will be completely different from life as we know it now. Life in heaven will be significantly different from anything we have experienced hitherto; the issues we face, such as marriage, illness and suffering will be swept away; even death – "they cannot die!" There is a totally new kind of life; the whole focus will be on God, with Jesus at the centre; we are God's children, children of resurrection, in the presence of God forever, loving God wholeheartedly, in the perfect life of love and worship with Jesus at the centre. We all have questions to ask about that, but we don't know all the answers; so often, because we don't know the particular details, people will not believe big picture; we miss out on the big hope and huge expectation because we can't dot the 'i's and cross all the 't's! Resurrection means a totally new kind of life, in perfect peace and in the presence of God forever.

2. What God is like: Jesus again: "you want to quote the Bible at me; well, then here's a hugely important piece of the Bible that you've not understood!" "*But in...*" (v37f) Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3, is meeting God; God introduces Himself to Moses: "*I am...*" (Ex 3:6) I can't do better than quote Michael Wilcock: "Jesus attaches the fullest possible meaning to the words of Exodus 3:6 and His argument is: 'If in the time of Moses, when Abraham is long since dead, the Lord can still say that he "is" the God of Abraham, then there must still be an Abraham for Him to be God of! A man with whom the living God has a living relationship must himself be alive, even though he may physically have died.'" (p184) God is the living God, who has a living relationship with people of faith, people like Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Paul, people like us and that living relationship is not stopped when we die; the living God lives on and we live on and that living relationship of love lives on too. Again, we want to know what that means: what does Abraham look like now? Without answers some won't believe; so they miss out on big picture.

So the Sadducees missed out on the big picture; they did not know the power of God, they did not really understand the Bible because they were caught up in trivial things in order to discredit ideas they didn't like! They missed out on the hope and expectation of the resurrection that would fill their hearts and strengthen them when life was hard; they missed out on the notion of a living relationship of love with the living God, a relationship that not even death could end. All they had at the end, was

this life, their power and wealth and they even missed the goal of their priesthood, to draw people near to God.

Before we shake our heads and say 'how stupid were the Sadducees', we are not entirely blame free on this score ourselves. Take the very notion at the heart of Sadducees question: the hope of heaven, the hope of Jesus' coming again to create a new world etc. The Bible gives us some insight into that great and glorious hope. But, clearly, we are not told everything; so people come with questions to ask about some of the unknowns and frustratingly we have to say 'we don't know; we're not told' and when there are no answers to their questions, some ditch the whole notion completely; they won't believe in heaven or in Jesus' coming again because their questions can't be answered. So they miss the big picture, the big hope, the whole big truth because they focus on particular things, smaller things. We are children of God and children of the resurrection; I don't know all that Jesus means by that; but the hope excites my heart that one day we will be with Him, we will see Him face to face, and everything will be made new!

Churches are very good at trivial things. E.g., some will say that the only kind of worship that churches should have because it is the only kind of worship that honours God is led by a pipe organ; others will shake their heads at that and say that the only worship that will honour God in the future is led by a praise band; so the debate rages on between these two points of view. The danger: we miss the big picture: God blesses the worship that comes from the hearts of His people led by a pipe organ and led by a praise band; God is at work in a whole variety of ways. There is a story about the famous London evangelical Church, Westminster Chapel: they had two communion tables, but of course, only needed one; there was a real danger that the leadership would blow apart over which table to keep and use! Or Christians fall out because someone said something to X who responded by saying something else to Y and then Z got to hear about it and ... The situation gets all out of hand for a very small thing. The danger: we miss the big picture: the same God is at work in each of X, Y and Z; the same Spirit lives in all of us, the living God is in living relationship with all of us and we all need to have relationships shaped by God and His grace.

The big picture: we have a great big God; Colossians 1:15-23 tries to capture something of the bigness of God and of Jesus to inspire people to believe in this great big God and live life in the way God wants; we come to the living God, the God who has always lived and has time and eternity in His hands; we come to God of Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, Paul; we come to the God who loves us and who wants to bless us and who wants us to love Him and to love one another and to live by faith. God has blessed the world by giving Jesus, crucified and raised, and in Him we have the hope of heaven and eternal life. This is the big picture; this is what God is like; this is what God has done. Don't miss that big picture by getting caught up in trivial questions or trivial issues; don't neglect faith and love because you think we're using the wrong kind of coffee and the scones have no fruit!

Rejoice in the greatness and glory of God; rejoice in the hope of heaven and Jesus' coming again; rejoice in the living God with us always and everywhere; rejoice that the same Spirit of God lives in all of us; rejoice that we are brothers and sisters together in God's family, children of the resurrection. This is the big picture: don't ever lose sight of it; it puts everything else in its proper place.