

Tomorrow will be my 3rd funeral in less than 3 weeks.

And of course, the Christian message at a funeral, is about the resurrection – it's about life after death – it's about the glorious hope that we Christians live with, that when Jesus returns, we will be raised from the dead. **In** death, we won't be separated from Christ, and death has no hold over those who are **in** Christ, because we will be raised.

And when we talk about it being a hope, it's not "Gee, I hope this is gunna happen" – like "*I hope Robyn's going to buy me a nice, new shiny pistol for Christmas*" – like *that's ever going to happen....* The hope of the resurrection, is a sure hope – it's a certain hope – it's something which is guaranteed, and we're just looking forward to the day when it **does** happen.

That's the Gospel message, and that's what we should be focused on.

Did you know, that when we're focused on eternity, it actually makes following Jesus a whole lot easier. You see, when you're focused on eternity, no cost in **this** life, is too high. Nothing that you have to give up, to follow Jesus, is too valuable. No sin, you have to repent of, is too pleasurable to be rid of it.... Because this life is fleeting, and eternity, is wonderful, and it's long (hence its name)....

But when we're **not** focused on eternity – when this present life seems to be so wonderful, and so pleasurable, and so meaningful, that we'd do anything to hold on to it.... Well, that's when it gets really **hard** to follow Jesus. Because, to

follow Jesus, means that we might have to give up some of that stuff that we love so much.

Very often, ‘eternal values’ are in contrast to our present worldly values. And so when worldly values are some of the things we don’t want to give up, it makes it very hard to follow Jesus.

Let me ask you a question, “Are **you** focused on eternity? Or is eternity a **side** issue for you? – something you’ll think about more, when you get old and one foot in the grave... You know, most people I bury, put it off; and put it off;... because eternity seems so far away... And then it’s too late.

Is eternity a side-issue for **you**??? Or do you even **believe** in the resurrection?

What about if we were to talk about the spiritual realm? Do you believe in Angels and Demons, and the Holy Spirit, and the power of God, and the reality of Heaven and Hell???? Do you believe all that stuff??? Or are you one of those who have moved past that??? ... And if you **have** moved ‘past it’, what have you moved on **to**?

From the late 18th Century onward, what’s known as “liberal theology” began to emerge, and I’d say that towards the end of the 20th century, was its hay-day...

And liberal theology, basically comes from a view that philosophical, scientific and social understandings, have a large part to play in our interpretation of Scripture... And so,

a liberal theology, tends to very much downplay the spirituality and the power of Christianity...

And so you may have even heard of Bishops (no less), who don't even believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. Some of them stop believing in heaven and hell, and Christianity seems to become more of a humanistic enterprise, with an aim to make life better now, for people who are suffering and hurting, but it denies any real power of God...

And one of their common mantras, is *"We don't need to believe that Jesus was born of a virgin. We don't need to believe that he was raised from the dead... The judgment of God and Heaven and Hell; and the miracles of Jesus and the early church, they can all be explained away..."*

*And they'll tell you, "In our age of enlightenment, we shouldn't be **expecting** people to believe in that sort of stuff any more. ... They'll tell you that: Most of the bible was written for and by the ancients, and they didn't know any better, but we do... We have science and philosophy now. We don't need to believe in those fairytales any more....."*

But you know what? It's **not** that they now know better – it's just another excuse for unbelief that's always been there...

When Paul was put on trial in front of the Jewish council, there were 2 parties there that day: The Pharisees and the Sadducees... The Pharisees, believed their bibles. They believed in life after death. They believed in Angels and demons. They believed in the Spirit...

But the Sadducees – well, they were the Liberals... Alright, just like the liberals of today, they didn't believe their bibles. They didn't believe in life after death. They didn't believe in the supernatural. They didn't believe in angels and demons, and the Spirit...

You see, there's nothing new about liberal theology. Don't ever get taken in by it. It's just the same old unbelief,,,,, rebadged as scientific and philosophical enlightenment... Don't get taken in by it.

Now, the thing is, as I read this, what leapt out at me, was that the Pharisees, were close to being on the right track. They believed in life after death. They believed in God. They believed in angels and demons. They believed in the Spirit... They believed that God was going to send His Messiah. They were waiting for the messiah... And all of their hopes and dreams would've been fulfilled in Jesus, the messiah.... But when He turned up, they hated Him. In their pride, they would not turn to Jesus....

Romans 11:

⁸ "God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes that would not see
and ears that would not hear,
down to this very day."

And you know what, it's the same today: There is a deep spiritual hunger in this world today... Just take a look at the renewed interest in spiritual enlightenment... And it seems that some people will look for spiritual realisation, or angelic

contact, or hope for the afterlife... And they'll look everywhere but Jesus...

Maybe the cost of discipleship is too great. Maybe pride keeps them from believing in the God who reveals Himself, and instead they believe in the picture of God they want to draw for themselves...

Jesus is the one who will meet all their hopes and all of their needs; He's the one who will fill all of their emptiness; He's the one who will dispel all of their loneliness; He's the one who will take away all of their guilt... but their eyes will not see, and their ears will not hear... And so they look anywhere but Jesus.

So, outside of the church, there's a lot of people like the Pharisees – looking for the spiritual truth, but they've shut the door to Jesus. ... The challenge to us, is are we going to keep knocking on that door, and "Yes, we must."

But then, within the church, there's a number of people (in some churches, a large number of people), (and often they are the biblical scholars, and the leaders of churches),,,, who are just like the Sadducees... They're attracted to the spiritual organisation, but not to the Spirit. They're firmly entrenched in the structures and the politics, and even the good works of the church,,, but they deny the truth of what the church is to proclaim... Those who have embraced liberal theology.

By the way, I've told you this before – do you remember the way to remember the difference between the Pharisees and the

Sadducees??? The Pharisees believe in life after death, and the spiritual world. The Sadducees don't, and so they're sad, you see...

A unity of belief, is **very** important in a church. Some people are of the attitude, "It doesn't matter what we believe". "Evangelicals and liberals – those who believe their bibles and those who don't, can all be part of the one church – we can all get on..." ... But that's simply not true. Take a look at the Jews – the Pharisees and the Sadducees, even when they had a common enemy couldn't get on.

And that's what Satan does in the church. Satan is the common enemy – loyalty to Christ, and preaching the truth of the Gospel, should be our common purpose... But while ever liberal theology is tolerated in the church, the church will constantly be in argument, with internal debates that divert us from our purpose... - keeping our eyes fixed on eternity in Christ, and inviting the world, to join this purpose...

V¹¹ The following night the Lord stood by [Paul] and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the **facts** about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."

And let this be the word of the Lord to us too: To take courage, and to continue testifying to the facts about Jesus... And you know (don't you?), to testify to the facts – to bear witness to the facts – it doesn't just mean to say them – it is to live them – it's both.

Live in the forgiveness of Christ. Live for eternity – not for today. And preach the truth – not the watered down, so-called enlightenment.

Don't let eternity be a side-issue for you. The world will know where your heart is – the world will know what you truly believe, by how you live your life – whether it be with an eternal perspective, or with a temporary, worldly perspective.

Questions.