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# Hold Fast to Truth

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 16 November 2025

2 Thessalonians 3:13-16 • Luke 20:27-38

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**Prayer: Lord Jesus, open our minds and hearts to the truth of your word.  
And may that truth lead and guide us, amen.**

Before we focus in on Jesus encounter with the Sadducees, a group who denied the resurrection, our first reading from 2 Thessalonians is linked in the sense that Paul writing to a church rocked by false teaching.

In the Thessalonica context some were teaching that the second coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the saints was imminent.

So close in fact that you might as well just sit around waiting. Contrast the Sadducees false teaching that the resurrection can't happen because there is no such thing as a future life and resurrection.

Paul's encouragement for the Thessalonian believers, "stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth, or by our letter.

Standing firm. Holding fast to the gospel is great pastoral advice, then and now.

Many problems result when folk have either a "pick and mix" view of scripture, accepting the bits they like, and rejecting bits they don't. Or equally only taking some parts of scripture as authoritative, all the while rejecting foundational gospel truths.

What of the Sadducees? They accepted only the first five books of the bible, the Law of Moses, and they didn't believe in angels, demons, resurrection or a future life.

They were among the elite, wealthy, sophisticated. Their religion was centred on tradition and the temple. Like many whose life is comfortable, why look to the supernatural, or a future life.

In our gospel passage the Sadducees think they have Jesus on the ropes with their of scripture. Jesus is not going to let them get away with using, or more correctly, misusing scripture, to make their case.

When Jesus was being tempted in the wilderness, one of the tactics the enemy was to misuse of scripture. When Jesus countered the first temptation by saying “it is written”. The enemy came right back at Jesus in the second temptation by saying “it is written”.

The enemy though did not correctly interpret or apply the scriptures. He twisted them to his own ends as a way of trying to gain authority over Jesus or lead Jesus astray.

Let me say very clearly, false teaching that uses scripture is the most dangerous kind. Those who claim biblical authority and say we can pick and choose, or take some parts as authoritative, or reinterpret core gospel truths cause immense heartache and damage.

Let me give a current example that is sadly and regrettably happening right now in our global Anglican context.

Many committed, gospel believing, followers of Christ in our Anglican pews may not be aware that currently there is major discord and division in the global Anglican communion over the authority of Scripture.

To simplify a complicated, and I think heartbreaking situation, as of a month ago today, on the 16 October, (GAFCon) a group that represents 85% of the global Anglican communion, has officially severed ties with the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Now while it's true that the Archbishop of Canterbury has no jurisdiction outside the Church of England. Anglicans from around the globe have always maintained what's known as the instruments of unity.

Since 1867, for nearly 160 years there has been a global gathering of Anglican bishops and Archbishops every ten years.

It's a time when Anglican leadership from around the world can fellowship, discuss and decide various things.

However, given some of the trends and directions happening over the last few Lambeth conferences. And especially given recent decisions and leadership appointments, many of the conservative, and orthodox leadership have said “enough” of revisionist teaching, and have officially broken ties.

There are about 100 million Anglicans in the world. As of a month ago 85 million have broken ties with the Church of England.

While the presenting issue is often thought to be over sexually, and same sex blessings in particular, the heart of the issue is really about the authority of scripture.

This issue has been bubbling away since 1988. I was at a Evangelical pre Lambeth gathering in both 88 and 98 with Derek Eaton. There was a lot of concern that revisionist thinking would shape the upcoming Lambeth conference.

At this point you might be wondering where I stand.

Personally, while I may agree with many of the concerns of the disaffiliating group. And I have colleagues and friends who have chosen to walk apart. I have chosen to remain among the 15% for several reasons.

Firstly, it's simply a fact of life that there will be different thinking and interpretations over what we find in the bible. Perhaps God can teach us more when we maintain love, grace and community even when we think differently.

As long as we agree in the essential, non negotiable gospel truths, the sort of things we affirm in our creeds, as long as we hold to the gospel essentials, should it not be possible to remain in fellowship, even when there might be differences of opinion over some things like women in leadership or even sexuality, which seem to be the hot button topics.

So my first reason for sticking with the 15% is my belief that as long as I can hold to gospel essentials, unity in diversity, has the greatest potential to develop maturity and grace.

I have also been an active part of the Anglican Church, for 40 years and have not, thus far, been put in a position where I have had to do or teach something that goes against the clear teaching of scripture.

With our current Bishop Peter, I don't think I ever would be put in that position.

The second, and main reason, for sticking with the 15% is a pastoral one.

- What of those faithful Anglicans who remain and are now a part of the 15%?
- What of those who might find their way into the existing Anglican Church?
- How are they to be taught and encouraged from the scriptures if too many of the orthodox clergy and lay leadership leave?
- What is the result when healthy, viable, growing parish's leave the diocese and no longer have the opportunity to shape and safeguard things.
- I'm tempted to say it's a bit like leaving the gate to the sheep fold open for the wolves to come in.

While standing firm, we challenge those who would teach and preach a different, or revisionist gospel.

Jesus is being tested by a group of Sadducees and there is no way Jesus is going to let them get away denying what is central to the gospel, the resurrection.

The Sadducees have set Jesus up. There is a provision in the Law of Moses that safeguards the family line should a husband die. The brother will take the place of the husband.

Well, posit the Sadducees, what if a woman has 7 husbands. In the resurrection how will that work? It's a ridiculous twisting, or misuse of scripture to make their case.

Such set up questions are not an uncommon tactic when folk want to back someone into a corner.

Let me give you an example. A month or so back I listened to a RNZ interview of a union leader who was being interviewed over the upcoming national strike that happened a few weeks ago.

One of the points the union leader was making was that the wage rise offers that were being made by the govt were not acceptable because in real terms the cost of living meant employees would essentially be going backwards.

As the interviewer was pushing back on a couple points the union leader said this "do you want people to get poorer?"

If you say “no” you are giving tacit agreement to the premise of the union leader that the offers are unacceptable. You obviously can’t say “yes, I want people to get poorer.”

As I was listening, I was pondering how I might answer the “do you want people to get poorer” question.

I guess you could say something like, however much we might like to pay X or Y, to hard working and valuable groups like teachers and medical folk, and I do believe we are facing a crisis, and we need to do more to support and grow those sectors, I was involved in one of them for 8 years at a management level prior to retirement.

But however much we would love to see these valuable sectors and people supported, you always need income to exceed outgoings.

You could, if you wanted to be a bit blunter say, “you don’t seem to understand how mathematics and the economy intersect”. “Let me explain it to you”.

In our gospel story, Jesus was posed a kind of “do you want people to get poorer?” question. Jesus gave a “let me explain what you don’t understand” kind of answer.

More, Jesus did it by using the very scriptures that the Sadducees held to be canonical or authoritative. The law, the teaching of Moses.

Where the Sadducees try to make their case using a snippet of the Law. Jesus comes back at them with Moses, the one who wrote their law library.

For good measure he includes the way Moses speaks of the patriarchies, Abraham, Issac and Jacob.

So what did Jesus explain?

Firstly, there is a difference in this age and in the age to come in regards marriage. In this age people die so marriage and procreation is needed.

In the next age, we will be like the angels. I’m not sure what that means. I do understand though that if there is no death in the next life, the provision of the law in regards procreation is redundant.

Secondly, that there is life after death is a gospel given. The way Moses speaks of Abraham, Issac and Jacob as being alive is simply a way of showing Moses' faith in the work and perspective of God.

Vs 58 he is God not of the dead but the living, for to him all of them are alive.

How? Because the work of the cross transcends history and has effect back through time, as well as on into the future.

Abraham, Issac and Jacob are alive in Christ just as we are. They are alive in, and to, God because the work of the cross is retrospectively applied to all who have faith in God, even before the coming of Jesus.

Put simply. The work of God in Christ spans history, past, present and future.

Let's look a little at what's at stake if there is no resurrection. Let's let the apostle Paul answer the question.

One Corinthians 15 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain..... You are still in your sins and those who have died in Christ have perished..... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

In other words, not great to base your hope and life on a delusion, a lie.

Matthew also records the same encounter between Jesus and the Sadducees. Same loaded question. Same way of interpreting and misusing scripture that showed their ignorance.

Jesus pushes back even harder in the Matthew account. "you are wrong because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." Let me enlighten you.

The fact is this. The Sadducees had little to offer and little to hope in. It's often the case with the wealthy and the elite, the sophisticates of this world, as the Sadducees were, that all their eggs are put in the "this life" basket.

I will believe in, and put my trust only in what I can see and touch. This life is it and it, and is all that matters. It helps when life is comfortable.

As said, the religion of the Sadducees was largely centered on the temple and tradition. When the temple was destroyed in AD 70 that was the end of the Sadducees.

There is a saying, the liberal church will always have within it the seeds of its own destruction.

To finish: There will always be groups and individuals who deny, and or, reinterpret key gospel truths. There always be those who misuse scripture to their own ends.

It is always needed that we stand firm on the gospel and we let the Holy Spirit be the arbiter of truth. Let me add, as we do that, we do so in a gentle and loving way that exhibits grace and generosity.

As far as the 85 vs 15% global Anglican divide, I'm not sure where all this will end.

But one thing I know.

- The church belongs to Jesus.
- It is he who builds it.
- We can trust in him.

Even if it means living with an amount of ambiguity and difference of opinion.

God has his faithful people all over the place.

- In every denomination.
- In every congregation.
- Our responsibility is to stand firm and gracefully and lovingly hold to the truth.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, you said "I will build my church and the very gates of hell will not stand up against it. Encourage, and uphold your people this day, wherever they may be found, amen.

