

A Question About Resurrection

Mark 12:18-27

In Mark 12:18 we start round three in the debate matches between Jesus and his opponents in the temple. It was near the end of the earthly ministry of Jesus and things were heating up between Him and the Jewish leaders who wished to catch Him in some inconsistency or some supposed violation of the Mosaic Law so they could get rid of Him. In the first round the religious authorities tried intimidation: Who do you think you are? The result: they slink away intimidated by the crowd. In the second round the shrewdest of the Pharisees and Herodians collaborated on a question sure to entrap Jesus. The result: they are left speechless and the crowd even more amazed at Jesus' wisdom. Give the opponents credit; they come back for yet another round, this time with a strategy to make Jesus appear foolish.

Follow along in your Bibles as I read Mark 12:18-27

18 Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him; and they asked Him, saying:

19 "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.

20 Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring.

21 And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise.

22 So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also.

23 Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife."

24 Jesus answered and said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?

25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

26 But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? , Exodus 3:15

27 He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken."

THE SECT: Sadduces

This is Mark's first and only reference to the Sadducees. Let's review who they are. The Sadducees were a minority sect among the Jews. They may have been few, but they were the most powerful and influential of all the Jewish sects. The

Sadducees controlled all the buying and selling that went on at the Temple. Thus, they were angry with Jesus because He had interrupted their business when He cleansed the Temple, Mark 11:12-19.

The Sadducees also controlled the priesthood. All the high priests and chief priests were Sadducees. The Sadducees also formed a majority of the Sanhedrin, or the Jewish Supreme Court. They were aristocratic and wealthy.

They also are not popular. The Sadducees were disliked by the common Jew. They were often aloof, thinking they were better than everyone else. They were rude, insensitive, and very harsh in their judgments and punishments as we will see when they put Jesus on trial.

They were also disliked because of their theology. The Sadducees were extreme literalists in their interpretation of Scripture. All they accepted as truly authoritative was the Pentateuch, or the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They thought that doctrine could only be based on those books. The doctrine that caused them the most trouble with the people was their denial of all things supernatural.

They believed in the existence of God, but they rejected everything else that was of a supernatural nature. They did not believe in demons, angels or the devil, they did not believe in miracles. They did not believe in Heaven or Hell. They did not believe in a future judgment. They did not believe in life after death, nor did they believe in the resurrection of the dead.

Yet, because they did not believe in life after death, a resurrection or a future judgment, they tended to live for the moment. They lived their lives for power and profit. By the way, this is the same mentality that grips modern man. Many people in our day have rejected the Bible as the standard and rule of life. Because they have done that, they have no hope of life after death, and they have no hope of resurrection. They have no fear of a future judgment. A majority of people don't believe in the existence of the devil or Hell. Because man does not believe that he will face God in judgment, he lives as he pleases, Rom. 1:18-31.

The Sadducees hate Jesus who represents a threat to their political stability because the people hail Him as the messiah and a king.

So now, the Sadducees take the floor ready to shame Jesus with their impeccable logic and biblical knowledge. They choose the topic of the resurrection as the means to show Jesus up. They want to make Him look foolish.

THE STUPID QUESTION: Whose Wife Will She Be?

These men appeal to "Moses". He was the great lawgiver. He was the spokesman for God. He was universally respected by all the Jews. The Sadducees knew of Christ's respect for the Scriptures, so they approach with what they see as a problem from the Word of God. These men have constructed a puzzle that they feel Jesus cannot solve. Their aim is to embarrass Him in front of the people who have gathered in the Temple.

They begin to tell Jesus a story based on the Old Testament law of levirate marriage. This law was taught in Deut. 25:5-10. This law made provision for families, tribal names and inheritances intact. If a man died, with no living children, his next of kin would marry his widow and raise up a child in the name of the deceased. You can see this practice as early as the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. It forms the basis for the marriage between Ruth and Boaz. This was a very important law to the nation of Israel. It guaranteed that a family's inheritance would stay in the family.

Based on this law, the Sadducees come to Jesus with a tale of a man and a woman. The man died without leaving an heir. The man had seven brothers. When he died, the next brother took the wife, but he died before producing an heir. Each of the brothers married the woman in turn and each died before producing an heir. Finally, the woman herself died. I would say that is one very unlucky woman!

Their question is, who will she belong to in the resurrection of the dead? Most of the Pharisees, who believed in the resurrection, believed that life in eternity would be a continuation of life here on earth. They believed that a man would have the same family in Heaven that he had here.

Of course, the Sadducees didn't even believe in a resurrection, they were just trying to embarrass Jesus. They were probably trying to mock His belief in the resurrection as well. These fellows thought they had created a puzzle, a Gordian Knot, that Jesus could not solve. They thought their question revealed the absolute absurdity of the resurrection. They thought they had Jesus trapped. In their eyes, whether He answered or not they believed they could claim the victory over Him. Whatever their intention, their question was absurd and Jesus proved that by His answer.

I suppose the Sadducees finished with a smirk on their faces and expected Jesus to turn red in the face and become flustered. After all, what could he say? How could he respond?

In truth, he has no trouble responding, and he does so in a way that is a verbal smack in the face.

JESUS' SOLUTION: You Are Mistaken!

Jesus began His response by accusing these men of being in error. In verse 24 Jesus says to them, "**Are you not therefore mistaken.**" The word "**mistaken**" means "to stray, to wander from the right way."

Jesus went on to say that they were wrong thinking came from two specific areas.

They don't know the Scriptures and you don't know the power of God.

1. They were ignorant of God's Word – These men read the Scriptures, and they believed what they read, but they were ignorant of the message in the Word. If they had just taken the time to read the whole Word and believe it, they would not have been confused about the resurrection. The truth of the resurrection is printed all over the Old Testament.

Psalm 16:9-11 -- Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

In this Psalm David states the confidence that he's going to go into Sheol, the grave, and he's not going to stay there, he's coming out the other side through the path of life into the presence of God. And that, of course, was not only the confidence of David, but it turns out to be a messianic Psalm predicting the resurrection of Jesus Christ. David believed in the resurrection.

Psalm 23:6 -- Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.

Psalm 49:15 -- But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, For He shall receive me. Selah

Psalm 73:24 -- You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory.

Also Job believed in the resurrection:

Job 19:25-27 -- For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

The prophet Hosea believed in the resurrection:

Hosea 6:1 -- Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight.

Isaiah believed in the resurrection:

Isaiah 26:19 -- Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; For your dew is like the dew of herbs, And the earth shall cast out the dead.

Daniel believed it too:

Daniel 12:2 -- And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Do these Sadduces really think they are wiser and holier than David, Isaiah, and Daniel? They do not know the scriptures.

So Jesus corrects their false understanding of the resurrection. Notice how He begins His answer: **For when they rise from the dead.** Jesus believes in the resurrection. Then He simply says that we do not carry on our marital relations, but instead will be like the angels in that regard. That last remark no doubt irritated these unbelievers of angels!

When they rise from the dead there is no such thing as marriage. What is marriage, fundamentally? It is a union and a partnership between two people of flesh, for companionship, for human sexual fulfillment and for procreation.

Of course we always hope there are much deeper dimensions to a marriage than that, I don't mean to make marriage sound trite and shallow and mechanical, but fundamentally, those are the reasons people marry.

In Heaven will there be a want of companionship? I hardly think so. There will be perfect unity with God and with the angels and with all the resurrected citizens of that glorious place.

Will there be a need for sexual fulfillment? No, we will be in glorified bodies and there will no longer be procreation. That is what Jesus meant when He said they are like the angels.

And this is the other thing I wanted to say about this verse. Jesus wasn't teaching that when we die we become angels. The angels are angels and we are not. He was teaching that we will be like the angels in the glorified state of not having a need for the physical pleasures we enjoy now, nor will we have the physical restrictions we have now. And don't miss the fact that in this comparison also He was refuting their lack of belief in angels, and He was doing so in a simple, matter of fact statement regarding their existence.

So they now have the answer to their stupid question, so He goes back as Jesus always does, to the real issue.

Jesus then, unlike his opponents, deals straightforwardly with the issue of the resurrection. Verse 26, **But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?**

Who do the Sadducees revere above all writers? Moses. His books alone are the ones they study. So Jesus says, have you not read in the book of Moses? The fundamental argument of the Sadducees was that Moses did not teach the resurrection. There is no explicit reference to the resurrection of the dead.

But Jesus goes straight to the writings of Moses to prove His position. Again, like the previous answer he gave regarding taxes, his answer appears to be little more than a clever retort. God is the God of the living because he says "I am" the God of the patriarchs, not "I was." But Jesus is not a mere spinner of words and phrases; he is the master rabbi who understands the true depths of the holy Scriptures.

2. They were ignorant of God's Power

What does God mean, calling himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Consider what the statement would mean according the Sadducees' viewpoint. According to them, God means I was their God only while they lived. At death, at the moment of man's greatest fear, I ceased to have anything to do with them. They are now nonentities. They do not exist except in memory. The promise to

Abraham that he would be the father of millions was no more than that – a promise for him to dream about. It cheered him while he existed and nothing more. There is no future, only now.

Jesus is saying, Do you really think that was the message God was giving to Moses as he called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt? I am your God Moses while you live, but when you die you will be no more. Do you believe that Moses left his secure life at the age of 80 to do a work that he admittedly feared to do, because he was so moved at the idea of God proclaiming himself to be the God of those who no longer exist?

God is not a cemetery keeper! He doesn't walk around the big cemetery in the sky, pointing to memorial stones and saying, "I remember your father Abraham. We had good times together. I sure do miss him. There's Jacob's grave. Boy, he was a rascal!"

Yahweh, Jehovah, I Am Who I Am, is the God of the living, not the dead! Isn't that plain in the way that God interacts with his people? Did he create man in his own image just to pass the time with him for a little while before his life is snuffed out? Come on, Sadducees, think about this. What's the tree of life about if God had not intended for man to live forever? In Genesis 5 Moses lists the descendents of Adam noting how each died, but that God took Enoch away. Is there a way to end life without dying? Doesn't it make more sense to understand that Enoch is still alive with God? Do you really think that the exodus was about nothing more than improving living conditions? The great displays of God's power in deliverance, establishing the Israelites as God's holy nation, establishing the law and sacrificial system were all for the mere purpose of making the people good citizens the few years they exist? When God threatened to blot his people out of his book, do you think it meant nothing more than a scrapbook of memory keepsakes?

He is the God of Abraham, to whom God gave a child when he and his wife Sarah were all but dead. He is the God of Isaac, for whom he provided a substitute sacrifice, as the writer of Hebrews says, "**God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.**" He is the God of Jacob whom God transformed from a deceiver to a prince.

Truly, though, as Jesus said to them, You are badly mistaken!

To deny life after death and the resurrection requires that we deny the promise and hope that fills the pages of Scripture.

Without immortality and resurrection why would it matter if there were a God in the sky? If all God does is play with us in our brief existence, what does it matter in the end? How terrible for a man who lives a wasteful life, to realize his error on his death bed, and then cease to exist? How meaningless for a man to live a life of self-sacrifice only to die and the good he did come undone anyhow. The Teacher is right: all is meaningless if there is nothing but this life.

But we are not God's play toys to throw away when we wear out. Our destiny is not a mere plaque on God's memory wall. As C.S. Lewis wrote:

There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat" (Weight of Glory, p. 15).

Lewis' point in bringing that up was that we should treat our neighbor with respect and seriousness. The Sadducees saw only temporal, small mortals. Thus, their arrogance and rudeness. That is a good lesson for us to take note of.

But here is the real lesson I want you to take home. It is the emphasis that I think Jesus was making. The God you worship is your God forever. He will not leave you; never will he forsake you, especially at the time of your greatest peril – traveling into death. He who created you will sustain you.

Do you believe in the resurrection? Really? Does that sound like a strange question to ask of Christians? I wonder how much thought the average Christian today gives to his future rising from the dead.

In our churches and in our Christian fellowships and associations is there so much empty speculation and the asking of stupid questions going around that we're too busy to stop and recognize that Jesus, God in the flesh, spoke matter-of-factly about angels and about resurrection.

He said these things to them and less than a week later He demonstrated the fact as the first fruit of the resurrection.

God is the rewarder of those who seek Him and He is able to raise the dead. That means anyone you know who has gone on before you as a believer and it also means you. And he wants you to know that He is, not was, the God of all the saints that have gone before you, including the loved ones you are thinking of now.

My God is the God of Patricia Sipes, my Christian mother who died at 51. He is the God of all those who are dead to us, but alive to Him. Your God is, not was, the God of... You complete that sentence.

55 "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

Jesus concludes His words by saying "**You are therefore greatly mistaken.**" The Sadducees were guilty of "leading themselves astray". They were blind to the truth that was right before them and they chose the wrong path over the right path.

What about you? Are you following the right path today? Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior and Lord? Are you ready to go to Heaven, or are you still headed to Hell? Come to Jesus and be saved!