

**TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH****SERIES TITLE: MARK 12:18-27 | SERMON TITLE: GOD OF THE RESURRECTION****DAVE WAGNER**

---

It's the last week of Jesus' life, Jesus has come to Jerusalem, and the Jewish leaders are trying to discredit him.

Jesus has already had a few encounters and now we see the next one. One of the most prominent parties of Judaism was the Sadducees. This group consisted of aristocratic families and had a great deal of power in the Sanhedrin, since they made up the majority of the priestly families.

The Sadducees were enemies of the Pharisees, holding to different theological and political views. The Sadducees seem to have been welcoming of Roman and Greek influence, which would set them against the Pharisees. The Sadducees rejected the oral law which the Pharisees accepted; the former held only to the written Torah, and apparently held the Pentateuch to be either more important than the rest of the old testament or else the only authoritative part of the old testament.

This theological position of the Sadducees on the canon pertains to today's story. Because they put most or all weight upon the first five books of the old testament, and because the doctrines of resurrection and afterlife are either absent or extremely vague in this portion of Scripture, the Sadducees rejected these doctrines. They believed that at death the soul perished along with the body.

We should understand the Sadducee position on after life was a minority opinion among the Jews of Jesus' day. Most Jews held to the position of the Pharisees, which affirmed both resurrection and after life. However, it seems the Jews pictured the afterlife as very similar to the present life, such as in the area of marriage and sexuality. One writer says the majority of Jews believed marriage and sexual intercourse would continue in the world to come.

This controversy sets up the challenge which the Sadducees now offer Jesus. They have heard already that Jesus accepts the majority opinion on these issues. Their mistake, as we shall see, consists in assuming Jesus envisions the world to come in just the same way as the majority of Jews.

Their challenge takes the form of a quotation of Moses along with what is probably a hypothetical story. They refer to Moses' directions about the levirate marriage. This is when a man marries a woman but dies before she bears children. In order to preserve his inheritance, the man's brother (assuming he has one) is commanded to marry the woman and give her children which will continue the line of the dead brother.

Now the hypothetical story: The Sadducees envision seven brothers, the first of whom takes a wife but dies childless. One by one, each brother marries her but dies childless. Their question is, in the resurrection, which brother will have her as wife, given that all seven had her previously as wife?

Now their argument takes the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*. This argument works by taking a position and showing that if it were true, it would lead to an absurd, ridiculous, or unbelievable conclusion. So, if resurrection were true, it would lead to the silly conclusion of a woman who technically is married to seven different men.

The Sadducees are hoping to embarrass Jesus in front of the people. They aren't ready for the reformulation of the doctrine which Jesus is about to give.

Jesus insults them by calling them mistaken about God's power and the Scriptures. Recall that these men are either priests or scribes or both; this would be like an uneducated plumber telling an astronaut he knows nothing about space.

Jesus' rebuttal has two parts. First, he reformulates the doctrine of resurrection so as to escape the *reductio*. The Sadducees' challenge depends on the assumption that marital and sexual relations continue unchanged in the afterlife; without this assumption their challenge is void.

Here's the reformulation: When the righteous dead resurrect, they enter a kind of life free from marriage and sexual intercourse. Jesus compares them to the angels in heaven, who neither marry nor are given in marriage. If this is true, the Sadducean argument fails.

But Jesus adds a second support for the resurrection from the book of Exodus. Jesus no doubt cites this book since it is one which the Sadducees accept as authoritative.

Jesus cites the time when Moses met God in the burning bush and heard his voice. What did God say to him? God called himself "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

The meaning of Jesus' argument here is not easy to understand, but based on v27, it looks like Jesus is claiming that God's self-identification in the bush reveals that the patriarchs are not dead,

but still living, despite having died. In the words of the Gospel of John, they live even though they have died. Therefore, even in the Pentateuch there is evidence of the doctrine of resurrection and afterlife.

### **Considerations**

As a peripheral consideration, let's notice first that when our theology isn't working, we are wise to go back and examine our assumptions against Scripture. Notice the reason the Sadducees are wrong is that they don't realize they have a faulty assumption in their thinking, namely, that if there were an afterlife it would have to be exactly like the present one in terms of marriage and sexuality.

As we labor to refine our thinking about God and his truth, it is necessary we bring our assumptions before the bar of Scripture. Often our assumptions are hiding behind years of inattention and unexamined assertion.

Another peripheral consideration concerns many people's reaction to the saying of Jesus that resurrection life excludes marriage and sexual intercourse. I say "sexual intercourse," not "sex", since I believe we will be sexual, that is, gendered, beings for all eternity. It is not that we will not be men and women; it is that the marital, sexual relationship will not continue in the afterlife.

Some react to this with sorrow, thinking they must eventually be parted from their beloved spouse. Now life in general is good practice for learning to let go of things and people we love, so hopefully we are refining our ability to surrender and let go.

Additionally, we need to realize we are in process of becoming beings very different from what we now are. It's no surprise if, for a time, that process of becoming involved the marital/sexual relationship, but eventually that relationship is no longer needed. After all, we'd better leave this one to God and trust he is wise and good in his administration of these matters.

As to the sexual relationship specifically, people react with unbelief that someday they must give up forever the pleasure and relief of sexual intercourse. It's hard for them to imagine any life worth living without sex. Let me make two points.

First, some folks, especially many men, have been so thoroughly tormented by sexual temptation during their stay on earth that I frankly ask you this question: "Are you really sad to envision the removal of your sexual desire? Will it not more likely be the beginning of actual peace and unity

of mind and heart? Has your sexual impulse been such a friend to you thus far that you grieve the thought of giving it up?" Give this some thought.

Secondly, if the resurrection life sounds dull through lack of sexual intercourse, let me review an argument from CS Lewis. In handling this subject he imagines the possibility of attempting to describe to a child the delights of sexual intercourse. Of course this would be improper in reality, but just put that aside for the sake of argument.

The child tries to understand but says, "The greatest pleasure I know is eating chocolates. I can't imagine how sex could be better than that. When I'm older, will I be able to eat chocolates during sex?"

To which the adult replies, "Well, I suppose, but in sex one has more important things to think about than chocolates." At this the child shakes his head and thinks adulthood must be very dull indeed.

So is the man who thinks Resurrection Life dull through lack of sexual intercourse. He is a child in spiritual things. Had he tasted the presence of the Lord for even five minutes he would have a very clear idea of Someone Whose presence and communion are so fulfilling they leave one completely forgetful of sex altogether. For those worn to the bone with sexual temptation, that forgetfulness itself is a relief worth a high price.

But those are all peripheral concerns. The primary effect of this story is to affirm the Christian doctrine of Resurrection.

So what is that doctrine? Just that, at the end of history, every man, woman and child who has ever lived and died will rise from the dead. God will reunite their spirit and body; he will bring them back to a physical, bodily life. And then they will stand before him in judgment.

Our story only concerns the righteous dead, so we'll set aside the resurrection of the wicked for now.

When the righteous dead rise, they will not merely return to the old kind of life we now possess. Resurrection is not resuscitation. Resurrection is not a coming back into old life, but a moving forward into a whole new kind of life. It is the kind of life which Jesus, since his resurrection, has come to possess.

It is the eternal life of God. It is an unbreakable, incorruptible, undefiled, and immortal life. It is not a life that can be reversed. Several people have been resuscitated in history; all of them died again. Those who resurrect to eternal life never die again, even as Jesus could never die again.

Jesus compares human resurrection life to present, heavenly, angelic life, in terms of marriage and sexual intercourse. Is it possible there are other similarities?

If so, we have all the more reason to view resurrection life as a life of power, exaltation, glory, beauty, and immersion in the presence of God and Christ, since such are the qualities of the life of the angels.

Further, we must emphasize that resurrection life is life indeed; that is to say, it is a life totally free from death. The life we now live is no such thing. The futility, the vanity, the corruption of death even now lives within these bodies of ours. We may not yet be in death but death is already in us. And every day it is slowly getting the upper hand. Eventually it will overcome us entirely and its victory celebration will be our funeral. Death will have won in our lives.

Resurrection life is a life free from death. That vanity and hopelessness which accompanies these bodies of death will be gloriously absent. This will be real life, pure life, immortal and deathless life.

The writer of Hebrews has something interesting to say bearing on this subject. He tells us that when God dealt with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the other saints, God promised these people more than was evident from the old testament stories. He says God promised them a city which has foundations, a heavenly country, something far better than just plain old Palestine.

God is the God of Abraham. And as his God he promised him resurrection life. And Abraham believed God and was thereby justified. It isn't even possible then that the God of Abraham could be anything other than a resurrecting God. He is the God of those who, through sacrifice and divine promise and power, are alive unto God even if they die. Their life is hidden in Him. They can be killed in this world, burned, crucified or sawed in two, and it has absolutely no effect on their hidden life in God.

If in death the saints are lost to the world, no matter, they are not lost to God. He still possesses them as his people, and he their God. He isn't the God of the dead, but of the living. And Jesus says he's going to show it powerfully when he summons his people to rise from the grave.

I just want to close with one application of the doctrine of resurrection. The fact of afterlife casts a whole new shadow over the present life. It forces us to consider well our actions in light of the world to come; how do our present actions compare with the life to come? Are they actions we could comfortably perform then, once resurrected? Or are they actions which would make us ashamed in that bright world?

The fact of afterlife casts a new shadow over our pleasures. Whatever enjoyment we might have here is a passing, fleeting enjoyment, soon to be overshadowed completely by the joy to come. The wise Christian holds present enjoyments lightly.

The fact of afterlife casts a new shadow over our sufferings. These are temporary, fleeting sufferings. They will not last. We live in the strange in-between, the Vale of Tears where death, tragedy, pain and sorrow are common place. However bad these sufferings are, they are only momentary sufferings. Light, momentary affliction is working for us an eternal weight of glory which far surpasses these sufferings.

The fact of afterlife casts a new shadow over our present ambitions. It's good to have goals and work hard and accomplish things. But hold it all with a loose grip. The greatest earthly accomplishment turns to sand at the start of eternity. No one has a million dollars in heaven; no one has a PhD. No one takes their trophies with them. In the world to come Christians don't have any trophies because they themselves have become trophies; trophies won by Jesus, as a memorial to the grace of God.

Lastly, the fact of afterlife casts a new shadow over our work for the Lord. Your service to the Lord is not in vain; it has a great reward and holds great promise for the future. I said a moment ago Christians have no trophies in heaven; that's not true. The service done for God becomes our trophy. Those we bring to Christ and build up in Christ become our joy and our crown. We have trophies alright, but not at all according to the standards and values of this world. All the rewards in afterlife concern service to Christ, the saving of souls, and the helping of the afflicted, especially the Christian afflicted.

You will see it with your own eyes, brothers. The earth, like a giant womb, will give birth to the departed spirits. After your flesh has been destroyed you will again stand on your feet and behold the glory of the Lord with your own eyes. As for the wicked, their portion is in this life; but when we awake, we shall be satisfied with His Face.

