

The God of the Living (contd)

Jesus' Last Days (Mark): Part 11
Mark 12:18-27 (Mt.22:23-33, Lk.20:27-38) 2/14/2021

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Mark 12:18 Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 19 "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. 20 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. 21 The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. 22 In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. 23 At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

24 Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 26 Now about the dead rising-- have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"

Introduction

Jesus tried and convicted the Sadducees on two counts of ignorance:

- 1) Ignorance of the Scriptures, and
- 2) Ignorance of the power of God

I mentioned both briefly in the last message, but I think there are some more lessons for us on both topics. First, the power of God.

The Power of God

One quick point I want to make about this because many people today have a similar reaction to the idea of resurrection as the Sadducees, and for the same reason. They don't understand God's power.

The objection I've heard people bring up has to do with bodies that are destroyed. People ask, "What about bodies that were burned or blown up or eaten by animals? How could they be raised?" Sometimes people don't want to be cremated because they are afraid it will foul up the resurrection.

First of all, I don't even understand that argument because all bodies are destroyed eventually. No matter how much embalming they do, and how tightly they seal your coffin, eventually, your body will disintegrate.

But still, people don't have as much problem with God somehow resurrecting a pile of dust, as long as the dust is still gathered in the same spot. But if your body gets eaten by an animal, so the cells that were your body now become part of that animal, and then someone eats the animal, so now it's part of their body—how will God ever sort all that out?

Anyone who raises an objection to resurrection or any other miracle on the ground that it would be impossible doesn't understand the first thing about God. What is the first thing about God? What's the first thing the Bible tells us about God on p.1 of the Bible? He created everything out of nothing. He didn't have any trouble creating you out of nothing the first time; you don't think he has the power to re-create you?

In order for God to raise your body from the dead—that same body you have now, does he require those cells you had when you died? No. The cells in your body are not what make your body you. Did you know your body replaces all its cells every 7 to 10 years? Your body right now—did you know there isn't a single bit of you that existed 10 years ago? And there's not one cell of that body you had 10 years ago that's still in existence? And yet, it's the same body. You weren't any more or less you back then than you are now. It's not your cells that make you you. It's God who makes you you. He did it once from scratch; he'll do it again. If you believe in the power of God, resurrection is no problem.

What Will Happen to Our Relationships?

And if you're worried about the fact that there will be no marriage in heaven, don't. When you first read this, if you're like me and you love being married, this might sound a little distressing. Tracy and I aren't going to be married anymore? Can we at least go on dates in heaven? What will relationships be like?

I don't know what they will be like, but I do know our current love relationships will still exist. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 says when our believing loved ones die, we don't grieve like the rest of men who have no hope of resurrection. The implication is, we don't grieve like them because we know we'll see each other again. That wouldn't make sense if when we get to heaven, all our past love relationships were wiped out.

So we'll still know each other, we'll still love each other. In fact, we'll love each other far more than we do now because our love won't be contaminated with sin anymore. So your capacity to love will be far greater, and on top of that, you're spouse will be much more lovable in their glorified state. So we'll love each other more than we ever imagined possible in this life.

We don't know a lot of details, but we know that at the resurrection, everything will be better than it is now. Nothing will be worse. We're not going to get to the new heavens and new earth and say, "I like it here, but I sure do miss Taco Bell" ... or going to movies or a vacation at the beach or even the joys of marriage.

Marriage won't be needed. Men won't need a helper. Women won't need a provider and protector. Children won't need parents. Companionship won't be a problem. And most

importantly, we will no longer need a model to teach us about the relationship between God and his people.

Scripture

Okay, so all that under the heading of the power of God. The second count Jesus convicted them on had to do with Scripture. If they knew the Scriptures, they would know that resurrection is a reality.

OT References to Resurrection

I mentioned in the message that there are several direct references to resurrection in the Old Testament, but they don't appear in the books of Moses. Just to give you an idea of what passage I had in mind, here are the clearest ones in my judgment:

Daniel 12:2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

Psalms 49:15 But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.

Job 19:26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.

Isaiah 26:19 But your dead will live; their bodies will rise.

Psalms 16:9 ... my body also will rest secure, 10 because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. 11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Hosea 13:14 I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?

I believe those are clear references to resurrection. And it's often said that Jesus made the argument he made rather than using these passages in order to accommodate the fact that the Sadducees only accepted the books of Moses. I think that's possible, but the text doesn't say that. And I think it's likely that the main reason Jesus chose to argue from the burning bush account is not that it came from the books of Moses, but because it is the strongest argument there is. Jesus could have quoted those other passages, proving that resurrection is a fact. But he wanted to do far more than that. Instead of just proving it's true, he showed us that it's not only true but necessary given the nature of God.

No Accommodation

So I don't think Jesus quoted from Moses to accommodate their rejection of the rest of the Bible. And one reason I say that is that Jesus wasn't into accommodating unbelief, and you can see that from the fact that he brings up the angels.

25 When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.

These men don't even believe angels exist, so why include that in the argument? Answer: because the truth of Scripture is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to overcome unbelief. So we learn from Jesus' example—just because the person you're talking to doesn't believe in angels doesn't mean you need to stop talking about angels. Or Satan or resurrection or anything else.

Sometimes Christians will say, “You can’t use Scripture with people who don’t believe Scripture is God’s Word.” The Greek word for that is baloney-os. The solution to ignorance and error is truth, not accommodation.

Only the Scriptures Can Keep you from Error

So Jesus’ main point about Scripture is simply that the Bible does indeed teach resurrection. But there are some other lessons for us as well. For one thing, we learn from Jesus’ words here that only the Scriptures can keep you from error. He told the Sadducees that one reason they ended up in such error was a failure to know the Scriptures.

24 "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures ...?"

What About the Holy Spirit?

Some people want to opt out of the hard work of learning the Scriptures, so they use the Holy Spirit argument. “I’ve got the Spirit. He won’t let me be deceived or go astray. If something isn’t true, he’ll give me a check in my spirit, A feeling in my gut. A quiver in my liver—I’ll just know.”

What those people fail to realize is that the way the Holy Spirit enlightens a person is by enabling that person to accept what they are learning from the Bible. Step 1 is you study what the Holy Spirit already gave us—the Bible. Step 2 is the Spirit enables you to accept what you’re learning. Don’t expect the Holy Spirit to jump to step 2 if you can’t be bothered with step 1.

Just think about it—every Christian has the Spirit, right? And yet isn’t it obvious that some Christians end up getting deceived? There is a lot of disagreement among Christians over doctrine, which means it’s possible to have the Holy Spirit and still get mixed up. The less understanding you have of God’s Word, the more vulnerable you are to deception. One writer said, “Keep God’s Word, and God’s Word will keep you.

What About Tradition?

But the Sadducees didn’t do that, and so they wandered from the truth, which is ironic, because they prided themselves on how tethered they were to the Scriptures. They were Moses-only. They prided themselves on not wandering the slightest bit into any kind of doctrinal innovation. The Pharisees were forever coming up with new ideas and expanding out doctrines into infinite extrapolations in every direction. And the Sadducees looked at that and said, “No, we’re not going to budge from the basic, essential, original core of God’s Word.”

They were like many people today who are afraid to interpret Scripture on their own because they see that as being vulnerable to error, so instead they attach themselves to a tradition that supposedly goes all the way back to the Apostles. The Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox—people sometimes join those churches because they think it’s too risky to interpret the Bible for yourself; they want to just rely on the authority of an ancient tradition. That was the Sadducees’ approach.

But it didn’t work. Ancient traditions can wander from the truth too. Jesus never rebuked anyone for not knowing the traditions. But he rebukes these traditionalists for not knowing the Scriptures. There’s no substitute for that, there’s no escaping it, there’s no avoiding it. We need to do the hard work of learning the Scriptures.

Scripture is the Best Proof

Isn't it interesting that to prove resurrection is possible, Jesus takes them to a passage of Scripture in the OT? Put yourself in Jesus' shoes. If it were me, I think I might have gone another route. Like maybe, "How about we read a passage out of Lazarus' obituary? In fact, Lazarus, why don't you go ahead and read it for us?" He had just raised Lazarus days before this. Wouldn't that be a better way of proving resurrection?

No. For Jesus, pointing to the book of Exodus was an even greater proof than actual resurrections before their very eyes. God's Word is more reliable than our own experiences—more reliable than what we see with our own eyes. Your eyes have tricked you many times, but God's Word is never wrong.

Verb Tenses

As an aside, this passage tells us something about the inerrancy of Scripture. Some people believe that the big, major doctrines in the Bible are true, but we can't really rely on the little details. Those could be in error. But here Jesus rests a huge doctrine—the doctrine of the resurrection—on a verb tense. If God had said, "I was the God of Abraham," that would imply that the relationship was severed (like with Saul). But he didn't say, "I was." He said "I am Abraham's God."¹ If there are errors even as small as a verb tense, it could change everything. Either you can rely on everything in the Bible all the way down to the individual words, or you can't be sure of anything. If you doubt the verb tenses or anything else in the Bible, your argument is with Jesus who believed "I am" has to mean "I am" and not "I was."

Suppressing the Truth

Okay, so all that under the heading of knowing the Scriptures—knowledge of God's Word is the only thing that can keep you from error. Now, that's not to say you have to know every single thing in the Bible in order to be safe. If that were the case, no one would be safe. But it is to say that to avoid being deceived, you need a heart that hungers and thirsts for the truth of God's Word. When people like the Sadducees don't know the Scriptures, it's much more a function of their attitude than it is knowledge. They can quote the passages of Scripture by heart, but they don't really know them because the truth doesn't penetrate their heart.

And when that happens, you become an enemy of the truth, which is exactly what we see with the Sadducees. They were known as brutal, vicious men when people disagreed on things like this. In Acts 4 they throw the Apostles in jail for preaching resurrection. In fact, Paul once used that to get himself out of a jam. He was once on trial before the Sanhedrin and used the doctrine of the resurrection to start a fight.

Acts 23:6 Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." 7 When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 (The

¹ Some have objected to this argument on the basis that there is no verb here in the Greek or in the Hebrew of Exodus 3. But that argument confuses English syntax with that of Greek and Hebrew. All translations render the sentence "I am the God ..." and not "I was the God." This is because in Greek and Hebrew, when the verb is missing in a construction like that, it conveys a current idea, not a past idea.

Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.) 9 There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

They said that just to spite the Sadducees who didn't believe in spirits or angels.

10 The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

I don't know if that's what Paul wanted to happen, or if he really did just think it was a good moment to bring up the topic of resurrection. But either way, you can see how militant the Sadducees were about their unbelief. Their attitude was not, "That resurrection stuff is okay for you to believe if you want to; we're just not convinced." No, they felt it was their duty to prevent other people from believing it.

I always think it's interesting that people who don't believe in something get so worked up about the thing they don't believe in. It's so important to them that other people also don't believe. You find that a lot with atheists. Some of them travel all over the country and have debates and write books and do everything they can to speak out against the God they claim doesn't even exist.

Suppressing the Truth

Why does it matter so much to them? They don't get all upset about Santa Clause or the Easter Bunny, but they get really offended if you, in the privacy of your own brain, believe there is a God. Why does that matter to them? You could ask the same thing about the Sadducees and the resurrection. How does it hurt a Sadducee if some Pharisee wants to believe in an afterlife? The only answer I can think of is Romans 1.

Romans 1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed against ... men who suppress the truth ... 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ... so that men are without excuse.

They reason they get so upset about it is because they are working so hard to suppress a truth that deep down they know is true. They don't get all worked up about people who believe in a flat earth or who doubt the moon landing or who believe in alien life. They're fine with just saying, "Yeah, you believe in that stuff; I don't." But when it comes to biblical truths, God has confirmed them, he planted the knowledge of them deep inside each heart, and it keeps trying to bubble up within them, and they have to constantly press it back down. When they are shouting all their arguments in debates and online and in books, they aren't arguing with us. They're arguing with their own heart and trying to keep themselves convinced, because they just really, really don't want the truth to be true.

And in the case of the Sadducees, it's not hard to see why. The Sadducees were aristocrats. Powerful, influential, rich—they had it all in this life. But if there's an afterlife, then there's a judgment day, and that spoils the party big time. So they're on the warpath against the doctrine of the resurrection, and that's what they come at Jesus with.

Kinsman Redeemer

One last topic I didn't have any time for in the last message, but that I think is important enough that we give at least a brief overview of is the law the Sadducees bring up about marrying your brother's widow.

19 "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother.

The first paper I ever had to write in college was on the topic of that law, and I ended up titling the paper, "The Kinsman Redeemer: Scripture's Hidden Treasure." Not that it's really hidden—I just called it that because I had never heard of it before I got the assignment. But it's a treasure because of the role it plays in the whole biblical story.

It's known as the levirate marriage law (the word "levirate" means brother-in-law). It's the brother-in-law rule.

Deuteronomy 25:5 If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. 6 The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

What if the brother doesn't want to marry her? Maybe he doesn't even like her. Maybe he was hoping to find his own wife and marry for love. 7 However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife Then it goes on to lay out the penalty for men who refused to do this. He would be publicly shamed.

There's actually one famous example of a man who refused—Onan. Onan's brother died and left his wife Tamar behind childless.

Genesis 38:8 Then Judah said to Onan, "Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother." 9 But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so whenever he lay with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother. 10 What he did was wicked in the LORD's sight; so he put him to death.

This was a big deal to God. And as you keep reading in Scripture, you get an idea why. Later on the term Scripture used for the brother-in-law was kinsman redeemer. And the role of the kinsman redeemer went beyond just having children for the dead brother. It also involved redeeming lost property and other things, even including punishing someone who murdered your family member. We don't have time to get into all that, but I do want to mention the most famous and important passage of all that deals with the kinsman redeemer—the entire book of Ruth. Long story short, Ruth's husband died, and when the nearest relative refused to marry her, that left Boaz as the next closest relative. So he stepped up and married Ruth.

And the result was, instead of Ruth dying as a childless widow, she ended up giving birth to Obed, who was King David's grandfather. Without levirate marriage, David's great grandma and great grandpa never get together. And through that line we get Jesus.

In fact, when you read the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, the whole list is men except for two names. I'm sure there were plenty of godly mothers in Jesus' line, but none of them are mentioned. Only men, with two exceptions. One is Ruth, and the other is Tamar. The only two women in the Bible we know of who were involved in levirate marriage.

Conclusion: 1000 Generations

Let me leave you with one last thought. If we return to the most important point of this passage, which is the covenant faithfulness of God toward his people, I want to remind you of the fact that God promises that love for 1000 generations. Did you know that's repeated 5 different times in the Old Testament? The first is in the Ten Commandments. After the second commandment (don't worship idols), God says this:

Exodus 2:5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Now, obviously those aren't literal numbers, as if at the 1001st generation God's love would run out. The point of the numbers is just to make the point that God's blessing on the decedents of a godly family is a thousand times greater than the negative consequences of a wicked man on his decedents. Could it be that some things are going well for you in your life right now because of something someone did 1000 generations ago? I don't think the world has existed long enough for that to be the case yet, but I can say something about 100 generations ago. Very often a generation is defined as 40 years. If we go by that, 100 generations would be 4000 years, which happens to be the span of time from Abraham to today. (He was 2000 BC and we are 2000 AD, so that's 4000 years.) So even in a literal sense you and I are being blessed because of promises God made to a man he favored 100 generations ago. And it will keep going for another 900 generations, and forever.

Matthew 22:23 That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 24 "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. 25 Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. 26 The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. 27 Finally, the woman died. 28 Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

29 Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. 30 At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 31 But about the resurrection of the dead-- have you not read what God said to you, 32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

Mark 12: 18 Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 19 "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. 20 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. 21 The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. 22 In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. 23 At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

24 Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 26 Now about the dead rising-- have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"

Luke 20:27 Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. 28 "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. 29 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. 30 The second 31 and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. 32 Finally, the woman died too. 33 Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

34 Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, 36 and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.

37 But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 38 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."

39 Some of the teachers of the law responded, "Well said, teacher!" 40 And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

