

Mark 12:18-27 No One Stumps Jesus Falls Ch. PM 7/30/2023

In war, one army attacks another army. But victory is more frequent depending on how quickly the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th attacks happen. In human warfare through history, a basic tactic is to attack the enemy in waves without a pause, striking at him repeatedly before he has the opportunity to recover his defenses. The same kind of assault is also characteristic in spiritual warfare.

Here in our study of the Gospel of Mark, our author vividly described how Jesus Himself was the object of such waves of spiritual attack.

The first wave was in chapter 11:27, when Jesus was asked - by what authority did You overturn the tables in the temple? The second wave was in 12:14, should we pay taxes to Caesar or not? And now in 12:23, is the third wave, asking about a test case of marriage followed by repeated deaths and re-marriages.

The first wave attack question was about religious power – who has authority in the temple?

The second wave attack question was about government power – who has the power to tax us?

The third wave attack question is about God’s power - a purely theological question – arising from a specific test case about death and re-marriage.

The first question came from the chief priests, scribes and elders. The second question came from the Pharisees and Herodians. This third question came from the Sadducees.

But one thing that all 3 groups agreed upon – Jesus must be destroyed!

This series of questions was a spiritual attack on Jesus. But as we will see this third time - no one stumps Jesus. That brings us to our main point...

Despite another trick question, Jesus proved from Scripture that not even death could break the everlasting covenant promise of God to the patriarchs.

1. The Sadducees believed that there will be no resurrection. (v.18)

For the Sadducees, there will be no future resurrection. So, think of what that means for their viewpoint - for each baby born, their one lifetime in this world is all there is. We all know people like that. People who believe what was said in 1965, by singer Frank Sinatra, “you only live once, and the way I live, once is enough.” Then, a 1966 commercial for a liquid refreshment had this sales line, “you only go around once, so grab all the gusto you can.” Lately, this mindset is shortened to YOLO, which is an abbreviation for the phrase, you only live once.

The Sadducees were the priests, the group from which each new high priest of the temple would be selected. So, the temple was the special domain of the Sadducees. This temple in which Jesus was standing and talking with the Sadducees, was their temple, you see? Their temple was the very same temple where the previous day, Jesus had turned the tables over, and Jesus had

aggressively cleansed the temple - their temple! That is why the Sadducees were motivated to destroy Jesus.

The crowds contained groups of people who were of two differing opinions on this controversial theological topic. So, the potential was there for any answer of Jesus to cause the alienation of a significant group of people within that crowd.

This same debate showed up again later in the Bible, in the ministry of the apostle Paul. Let me read Acts 23:6-8, “...when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “*Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.*” And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.”

So our first point is confirmed – the Sadducees believed that there will be no resurrection. That brings us to our second point.

2. The Sadducees assumed that a resurrection would cause absurd implications. (v.19-23)

Verse 19, the Sadducees referred to Jesus as “*Teacher...*” We have heard that title before, as recently as verse 14, which was attack wave #2, when the Pharisees and Herodians referred to Jesus as “*Teacher...*” So, here we go again in attack wave #3. Group after group refer to Jesus as Teacher, but they do not listen to His teaching! Here the Sadducees spoke to the Teacher by giving the background to their question to Jesus. God had made provision for a family to be raised up if a married man had suddenly died before having children, and so his wife was left both a widow and childless. That part of God’s law was in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, and it is called levirate marriage. How it worked was a near relative would step forward to marry the widow, in order that she would have a child. Her first would be counted as a child of the former husband, her deceased husband. Why? This provision from God would carry his name forward. A man’s name and line of descendants was the man’s honor. To honor the dead man, they would protect the man’s family by giving him family! His family line would not be lost, and so his name would not be lost, and consequently, his honor would not be lost. An example of this is found in the story of Ruth. This provision from God sounds to us rather awkward, maybe even repulsive, but in the ancient world, it was understood as a merciful gift from God.

So this enters our story in verses 20-23, because here the Sadducees picked up the process of levirate marriage, and they presented to Jesus a test case that was absurd. Two husbands who each died leaving behind the same woman as the widow of both brothers, would have been sufficient to make their point. But in the crazy example that the Sadducees put to Jesus, this poor woman will have 7

deceased husbands in a row! The Sadducees assume that this situation must not take place in heaven. The Sadducees were assuming that if there were a resurrection and if there were a heaven, that God would insist that marriage must be between one man and one woman. But this is yet another place where the Sadducees were wrong!

For the Sadducees, their complex question was a hypothetical story - a debating ploy. They were playing a version of verbal chess with Jesus, trying to show that a future resurrection cannot be true, by showing the ridiculous scenarios that the existence of a future resurrection would cause. If the resurrection were true, just look at what might happen – and since that thought is ridiculous, the Sadducees want us to conclude that the thought of a future resurrection is ridiculous! The Sadducees were figuring that since God gave the levirate law about marrying this way, so God must be showing us that there is no resurrection. The Sadducees were attempting to show that the teaching about the resurrection is impossible, and they were using an extreme example around God’s merciful allowance regarding levirate marriage as their proof!

This was a classic type of debating ploy, for the sake of winning an argument. It was the kind of question that every Sadducee’s son in elementary school would ask every Pharisee’s son. No one had found an answer to it, so the question kept getting asked, with winning results for the Sadducees. So here, the Sadducees now asked the classic uncrackable question to Jesus, expecting that even the great Teacher Jesus would have no answer to their toughest question. They were trying to stump Jesus with their question, and bring doubt on the resurrection.

Their question would have considerable potential impact on the crowd. People do marry, and spouses do die, and the surviving spouses do remarry. So, the prospect of encountering more than one former spouse in the resurrection of heaven is a real prospect. What becomes of the earthly monogamous marriage bond, when it must be shared in eternity with more than one marriage partner? For the answer, we turn to words of Jesus.

3. Jesus answered that the power of God, taught in Scripture, clearly showed that the Sadducees were wrong about the resurrection. (v.24-27)

Verse 24, the first thing Jesus said was that the Sadducees were wrong. Anyone who denies the resurrection has fallen into error. Period. The Great Teacher was teaching everyone that the resurrection is a non-negotiable basic teaching. Even today there are modern-day Sadducees, and as soon as they say that there can be no heaven, can be no afterlife, can be no resurrection of Jesus, no resurrection of anyone else, we automatically know that they are in serious error, and that they are involved in spiritual opposition to Jesus Christ. Jesus is, by the way, the Resurrection and the Life! So, the Sadducees were wrong.

Jesus right away said that they were wrong. And Jesus then went further, by saying that the Sadducees were wrong for 2 reasons a) they did not know the Scriptures and b) they did not know the power of God!

In verse 25, Jesus corrected them by teaching that those who rise from the dead will not marry, but instead are like the angels of heaven.

Now let's consider this from the perspective of the Sadducees. If there will be no resurrection, it means that when people die, they are gone and that is it. What does that show about the existence of the human race? We would need to keep having babies, or else the human race, even in heaven, would die out. They had such a small view of God, that they seemed to think that heaven will be just like the world as we now know it. If they had understood the power of God to transform human life into a heavenly existence of everlasting life, they would have already known what Jesus was now needing to teach them.

In verse 26, Jesus said, “..in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush...” and so we know right away that this is Exodus chapter 3, the story of Moses and the burning bush. Jesus wanted them to be able to look it up, and also, Jesus was making his case from the section of the Old Testament that the Sadducees most trusted.

In verse 27, Jesus taught them from the Bible that since God is the God of the living, the conclusion must be drawn that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive. In His masterful reply, Jesus accomplished 4 things:

- 1) He showed why it was that the Sadducees had committed a glaring error
- 2) He proved His point by removing their false assumption that marriages on earth are continued in heaven
- 3) He proved the truth about a future resurrection from Scripture, and
- 4) He drew the only possible answer to the trick question and stated it with 2 words in the original, which translates to 4 words in our Bibles at the end of verse 27, *You are quite wrong!*

Had the Sadducees recognized the power of God, they would have understood that God is able to raise the dead in such a manner that marriages and having babies will no longer be needed in order to perpetuate the race of humans. The living humans will themselves each live forever!

Jesus challenged the theological assumption underlying their question. Jesus set out to challenge their wrong assumption that an afterlife would be just like our lives now – and therefore consequently to also challenge their other assumption that we should evaluate our future afterlives in terms of our current understanding of life on earth right now. 1 Cor. 15:50, “*I tell you this, brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*” This is precisely how the Sadducees were failing to appreciate the power of God. Resurrection is not a matter of human power, but of God's power.

Conclusion:

1. Believe in the power of God, because it is the power of God for salvation!

SI – a little boy named Philip was born with Down's syndrome, and he attended a third-grade Sunday School class with several eight-year-old boys and girls. Typical of that age, the children did not readily accept Philip with his differences. But because of a loving and creative teacher, they began to care about Philip and accept him as part of their little group, though not yet fully.

The Sunday after Resurrection Sunday the teacher brought pantyhose containers, the kind that look like large eggs. Each receiving one, the children were told to go outside on that lovely spring Sunday, find some symbol for new life, and put it in the egg-like container. Once they were back in the classroom, they would share their new-life symbols, opening the containers one by one in surprise fashion. After running about the church property in wild confusion, the students returned to the classroom and placed their containers on the table. Surrounded by the children, the teacher began to open them one by one. After each one, whether a flower, butterfly, or leaf, the class would ooh and ahh.

Then one was opened, revealing nothing inside. The children exclaimed, "That's not fair. Somebody didn't do their assignment."

Philip spoke up, "That's mine."

"Philip, you don't ever do things right!" the student retorted. "There's nothing there!"

"I did so do it," Philip insisted. "I did do it. It's empty. The tomb was empty!"

Silence followed. Not even the teacher could not improve on the statement. From then on Philip was embraced as a full member of the class. Because of an infection that most children would have been able to shrug off, Philip died not long after this incident. At the funeral this class of eight-year-olds together marched up to the front not with flowers, but with their Sunday school teacher, each to lay on the casket an empty pantyhose egg. They all believed in the resurrection.

Romans 1:16, "...*I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...*"

The gospel is the power of God for salvation!

The reason that the Sadducees were wrong is because they did not know or believe in the power of God. They did not embrace the gospel. They did not embrace Christ by faith.

This is a concluding lesson for us! Know the power of God. Believe the gospel, which is the good news about the power of God. Namely, that after Jesus died for our sins, Jesus rose again, giving us resurrection.

Listen to how Paul - a Pharisee - wrote about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:12-13, "*Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how*

can some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christy has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. (v.20) in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.... (v.23) Christ the firstfruits then at His coming those who belong to Christ. (v.57), Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Because Jesus lives again, we will live again.

Because Jesus lives forever, we will live forever!

Believe in the power of God for salvation!

2. Take it from the Great Teacher Jesus, that not even death could break the everlasting covenant promise of God to the patriarchs.

God’s promises did not suddenly stop for Abraham when Abraham died. God’s promises and blessings do not suddenly stop for us when we die. The God who revealed Himself as the God of Abraham is the unchangeable, eternal, covenant God who blesses, loves, encourages, and protects His people. Rather, the blessings of God continue forward after our deaths and beyond death. This is taught by God even in the Old Testament. Let me end with one Old Testament passage. Psalm 16:10-11, “...*You will not abandon my soul to Sheol (the place of the dead), or let Your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*”