

THE SCROLLS

Meeting The Messiah | Mark 12:18-27

Life Lesson

True faith is not proven by clever arguments but by humble submission to God's Word and confidence in His power. The Sadducees knew Scripture selectively and doubted what God could do, yet they missed the truth standing before them. Jesus reminds us that God is not limited by human reasoning. He is the God of the living, not the dead. When we trust both the authority of Scripture and the power of God, we live with hope, courage, and confidence that even death cannot defeat His promises. Therefore, we have hope in this life and the life to come.

Examine Scripture

18 Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him and questioned him: 19 "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife behind but no child, that man should take the wife and raise up offspring for his brother. 20 There were seven brothers. The first married a woman, and dying, left no offspring. 21 The second also took her, and he died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. 22 None of the seven left offspring. Last of all, the woman died too. 23 In the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be, since the seven had married her?" 24 Jesus spoke to them, "Isn't this the reason why you're mistaken: you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 For when they rise from the dead,

Is Heaven for Real?

In our text, we encounter the second wave of attacks on Jesus in Mark 12. Last week, the Pharisees and Herodians teamed up to trap Jesus with a political question. Now, the Sadducees plan to trap Jesus with a theological question. Though they deny bodily resurrection, they use it to try to humiliate Jesus and expose Him as an ignorant religious fanatic. Yet, as usual, Jesus turns the tables and exposes the Sadducees as ignorant of Scripture and the power of God.

Jesus not only exposes the theological errors of the Sadducees but also uses this opportunity to address life after death, which the Sadducees denied. In fact, the Sadducees regarded belief in life after death as absurd. This was in direct opposition to what Jesus had already taught about eternal life, heaven, and the resurrection, including His own. So, this is much more than just a question about life after death; it is an all-out attack on Jesus' teachings and authority.

V. 18

Before diving into the text, we need to understand who the Sadducees were and what they believed. First, this is the only time Mark mentions the Sadducees. The Sadducees were a small yet powerful sect within the Sanhedrin. In general, they were not well-liked by the Jewish people. They were wealthy aristocrats who promoted Hellenism and supported Rome. Though socially and politically liberal, they were theologically conservative, even hyper-conservative. The Sadducees considered only the Books of Moses (the Torah) authoritative. They denied the existence of angels, spirits, or anything supernatural. They were annihilationists, denying the immortality of the soul. The Jewish historian Josephus writes of the Sadducees: "The doctrine of the Sadducees is this: souls die with bodies." Thus, they denied bodily resurrection, as Mark points out in (v. 18). Also, in (Acts 23:8), Luke tells us, "For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, and neither angel nor spirit, but the Pharisees affirm them all."

Interestingly, the Sadducees, despite their biblical and theological ineptitude, maintained positions of power within the

they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven.
26 And as for the dead being raised—haven't you read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God said to him: I am the God of Abraham and 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.”

- In the margin, write, “Trap #2.”
- Circle “Sadducees” and write “small, but powerful sect” above it.
- Underline “who say there is no resurrection” in (v. 18).
- Circle “resurrection” in (vs. 18, 23).
- Underline “Moses wrote” in (v. 19). Write “Deut. 25:5” above it.
- Bracket “whose wife will she be” in (v. 23).
- Circle “mistaken” in (v. 24) and write “wandering from truth.”
- Draw a line from “you're mistaken” in (v. 24) to “you are badly mistaken” in (v. 27). Draw another line from “you don't know Scripture” in (v. 24) to “haven't you read in the book of Moses” in (v. 26). Draw another line from “power of God” (v. 24) and “when they rise from the dead” (v. 25). This shows the chiastic structure.

Personal Notes

Sanhedrin. Although they did not submit to the full authority of Scripture (adhering only to the Torah, not the Prophets or the Writings), they imposed their authority on others. Perhaps their wealth and political influence were used to intimidate the people and the Pharisees. This serves as a warning for the Church. We must be cautious about allowing the flexing of wealth and influence to circumvent biblical and theological leadership (James 2:1-13).

Although the Sadducees were theologically opposed to the Pharisees, as we saw last week with the Pharisees and Herodians, hating the same person makes the Sadducees and Pharisees unlikely allies. In fact, this may be an opportunity for the Sadducees to assert their superiority over the Pharisees. If they can trap Jesus with this theological question, they not only destroy Jesus' authority and following but also elevate themselves above the Pharisees. In their eyes, this moment must have been a “win-win.”

V. 19-23

Now, the Sadducees unleash their seemingly clever enigma on Jesus. First, notice how smug and pompous they are in calling Him “Teacher” (v. 19). Just as the Pharisees, the Sadducees use false honor to humiliate Jesus further. By calling Jesus “Teacher,” the Sadducees had no intention of learning from Him; they were mocking Him because they viewed His teachings as absurd. The Pharisees reacted to Jesus’ teachings with anger, whereas the Sadducees reacted with mockery.

Even with their theological scenario, the Sadducees mocked Jesus. In their minds, the absurdity of their scenario is only matched by the absurdity of the belief in life after death and bodily resurrection. In fact, most commentators regard the scenario presented as a running joke among the Sadducees. It was a common story to demonstrate the ignorance of the Pharisees and all who believed in life after death.

Notice how the Sadducees begin by quoting from the law of Moses (again, their only source of authority): “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife behind but no child, that man should take the wife and raise up offspring for his brother” (v. 19). This is from (Deut. 25:5): “When brothers live on the same property and one of them dies without a son, the wife of the dead man may not marry a stranger outside the family. Her brother-in-law is to take her as his wife, have sexual relations with her, and perform the duty of a brother-in-law for her.” This command was intended to ensure the succession of heirs and to prevent families from dying out. It was not permitted for a man to divorce his own wife and marry his brother's wife. It is assumed that the brother is single; therefore, he is free to marry his brother's widow. He was to be her kinsman redeemer.

The Sadducees describe a scenario in which a woman's husband dies, leaving no children or heirs. The first brother marries her, but he

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also dies without children. The next brother marries her, dies, and has no children. There are seven brothers, and each marries the widow and dies without children. Finally, the woman dies. The use of “seven brothers” alludes to the number seven’s symbolism of completion. The structure of this scenario is actually genius. The Sadducees carefully selected the details to make the case against the resurrection. As Robert Stein explains in his commentary: “In the former instance, whereas remarriage by the woman is permissible, in the case of brothers, if there are no children, it is specifically commanded in Scripture. Because it is commanded, the Sadducees argue that this command refutes a doctrine of life after death, and in particular the doctrine of the resurrection, because of the absurdity that would result. The well-thought-out nature of the illustration can further be seen in that not even the last brother had a child with the woman. As a result, no brother had any special claim on the woman as his wife in the resurrection.”

They must have had a smug sneer as they asked, “In the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be, since the seven had married her?” (v. 23). Again, they are not asking out of genuine curiosity; they are trying to embarrass Jesus. They think their clever story is enough to show that the resurrection is absurd. Jesus must either deny the authority of Moses and remain steadfast in his belief in the resurrection, or agree with them that the resurrection is absurd and thereby lose his integrity and authority as a teacher. Either way, the Sadducees feel they have done enough to make Jesus look like a fool.

Vs. 24-27

Jesus responds with a deliberate tactic to emphasize their error. Jesus uses a chiastic pattern. The use of a chiasmus in a debate serves as a double slap to the opponent. Points are not just made, but emphasized through repetition. Jesus points to the error of the Sadducees in a twofold reply, which is repeated. The Sadducees are wrong because they do not understand Scripture nor the power of God. The structure looks like this:

A: You’re mistaken

B: You don’t know the Scriptures

C: You don’t know the power of God

C₁: [The power of God] raises the dead

B₁: [Scripture is cited] In the bush passage, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God of the living

A₁: You are badly mistaken

First, Jesus says the Sadducees are mistaken because they do not know the Scriptures. The Greek word for “mistaken” is “planaō,” from which we get our word “planet.” It means “to wander off or to wander away from the truth.” Jesus is saying the Sadducees have wandered from the truth because they do not know the Scriptures. Sure,

Personal Reflection

1. Do I ever approach Jesus with a desire to test, debate, or defend my own assumptions rather than to humbly learn and submit to His authority?
2. In what ways might I be limiting the authority of Scripture in my life, embracing parts that comfort me while neglecting or resisting those that challenge me?
3. Jesus says the Sadducees did not know the power of God. Where am I tempted to doubt God's power to bring life, transformation, or hope in situations that feel final or hopeless?
4. How does my belief or lack of belief in the resurrection and eternal life shape how I live, prioritize, and endure today?
5. What step of trust, repentance, or deeper obedience is Jesus calling me to take in response to His teaching and authority in this passage?

Commentaries

Exalting Jesus in Mark by Daniel Akin

MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Mark 9-16 by John MacArthur

BECNT: Mark by Robert Stein

NIV Application Commentary: Mark by David Garland

Mt. Zion's Mission

Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to
MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY
 disciples of Jesus Christ.

they know the Torah and their "pet passages," but they refuse to submit to all the Scriptures, including the Prophets and the Writings. The resurrection is taught primarily in the Prophets (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:1-14) and the Writings (Dan. 12:2; Ps. 16:9-11; 49:15; 73:23-26; Job 19:26).

Yet because of the Sadducees' devotion to only the Torah, Jesus brilliantly uses the Torah against them to show the resurrection: "Have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, '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 (vs. 26-27). God speaks in the present, referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is still their God; therefore, they must still be alive, though they have died. Tim Keller writes, "Notice that Jesus does not hang the hope of life after death (like the Greeks did) on the idea of an immortal part of us. Rather, He rests in the commitment of God to us ('I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'). This is a very powerful argument for life after death. We have a God who cannot, at our death, scrap that which is precious to Him!"

Secondly, Jesus says the Sadducees are mistaken because they do not understand the power of God. God is the one who raises the dead. The resurrection is not merely a continuation of this present life. It ushers us into eternal life, with a different purpose. There is no need for procreation because there is no more death. There is no need for marriage to provide companionship, for there will be millions of brothers and sisters in Christ. Not to mention, our focus will be on worship in the glory of Christ, not on one another. Therefore, Jesus says, "When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" (v. 25). Now, we must understand that we, nor any saints before us, have or ever will become angels. Jesus is not saying that when we die and go to heaven, we earn our wings and become angels. We will remain human, in the image of God, completely glorified for all eternity. Jesus is just stating that we will no longer marry or be married in heaven. We will know each other, but our relationships will be different. Stein explains, "The reunion of married partners in the resurrection leads to greater joy and fulfillment than can be imagined, but marriage, as we know it here on earth, will cease to exist. The Sadducees' denial of this possibility was in reality a denial of God's power."

In the absence of a response from the Sadducees, it is clear that Jesus won the moment. They could not refute Him because He demonstrated from the Torah that there is a resurrection and that the nature and power of God can accomplish anything, including the resurrection of those who believe in Him.

What great hope this gives us! There is eternal life for those who believe in Jesus!