

Know The True God of Resurrection Power

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 12:18-27 / May 12, 2024

Introduction:

How often do you think of life after death? What do you hope it will look like for you? It is estimated that around 80 percent of Americans hold to some kind of belief in life after death. Books have been written to try and describe it. Movies attempt to capture our imagination with what it might be like. We might wonder what our bodies will look like, whether we will see our pets, and what it will be like to see loved ones again. For most people, this is a concept that occupies a lot of thought and leaves us with more questions than answers. Yet, over centuries there are always some who deny the concept of life after death to avoid accountability and the reality of needing to make decisions in light of it in this life. Our passage today, in Mark 12:18-27, holds another confrontation with some of the religious leadership in Israel over the notion of life after death. A group called the Sadducees approach Jesus with a ridiculous argument, trying to exalt their intelligence, deny the resurrection of the dead, and make Jesus look foolish for believing in such a notion. True to form, Jesus moves beyond their argument, exposes their pride and ignorance, and reveals His authority and wisdom. In this confrontation, He shows us both why the resurrection is foundational to faith and sets our minds on the true glory that awaits us for all of eternity. Through our passage, I see one truth to understand about our hearts, and another to understand about our God. The first truth is found in verses 18-25, how,

Pride Can Easily Lead to Foolish Ignorance

Mark presents this scene immediately following Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees and Herodians. It is as though Jesus doesn't have any time to rest before the next group comes to try and assert their authority. Look at how Mark opens in verse 18, "And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection." Pause there. This is the first time Mark mentions the Sadducees. We learn from Acts 5:17 they were a significant part of the Sanhedrin, and closely connected to the high priest. Other historical records show they either considered the Pentateuch, or 5 books of Moses, as the only authoritative Scriptures, or they saw those books standing in authority over and above the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. When they looked in the books of Moses, they found no evidence of the dead being raised, so, as Mark records, they denied the resurrection. In Acts 23:8, we discover the Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection, angels, nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe in all these things. In his book Antiquities, Josephus sums up their doctrine like this, "The doctrine of the Sadducees is this: souls die with bodies" (Antiquities, 18:1, 4). They were wellknown for denying this concept. Pick back up in verse 18 and follow through verse 23, "And they [the Sadducees] asked him a question, saying, 'Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.'" Because of how Mark opens in verse 18, we know their question isn't seeking to learn from Jesus, but trying to show how foolish the idea of the resurrection was. The scenario they propose is based on the Levirate marriage obligations in Deuteronomy 25:5-6 that called for a man to marry his brother's widow if she was childless, providing an heir to preserve his brother's name and keep the inheritance within his family line. The hypothetical question poses 7 brothers who had to fulfill this obligation with no child in the end. Around this time, most believed the resurrection, and world to come, would simply be a continuation of the conditions of our current lives, only in a more glorious state. So they ask, "if the dead are raised to life, and eternal life is a continuation of earthly conditions, like marriage, who gets to claim her as his wife for eternity?" Perhaps other religious leaders were stumped with this question, and they thought Jesus would be as well, proving their authority over Him. But they soon find out, their pride had led to foolish ignorance.

Look at verse 24, “Jesus said to them, ‘Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?’” Jesus emphatically states they are wrong. The term for wrong carries the idea of being led astray and wandering off track. They aren’t simply wrong on this matter; they have been led astray from the truth. He then describes how they had been led astray, cutting to the core of their pride. First, He says they don’t know the Scriptures. One commentary equated this to saying someone on Wall Street knows nothing about finance. The Scriptures were their bread and butter. They saw themselves as experts of them and even looked to elevate their understanding by suggesting the Pentateuch had greater authority over other Scriptures. This is an intentionally wounding accusation by Jesus. Throughout the Scriptures we find many poetic passages that point to the resurrection of the dead, and two clear prophetic words. Isaiah 26:19 says, “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.” The dead shall live and shall rise. Daniel 12:2 says, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Church, the Scriptures are clear about the resurrection. What the Sadducees claimed to be experts in, they are actually ignorant of, because of their pride. Because they wanted authority over their lives, they rejected the clear message of God. Family, are there any areas of God’s Word that you are denying because of your pride? Then, Jesus says, not only do they not know the Scriptures, but their denial of the Scriptures left them believing in an impotent God. Yet, the reality of their position is even more troubling. In saying they don’t know the power of God, Jesus is also commenting on their relationship with God, because those in true relationship with our God have come to know His power. Notice the reason He gives in verse 25, “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” Jesus confirms the resurrection of the dead while countering the assumption that the new world was simply an extension of what we enjoy now. He is showing how that understanding doesn’t accurately capture the power of God. Family, what we will be is going to look far different than what we are now. And how we will fellowship together is far better than what we now enjoy. As James Edwards says well, “God’s power to create and restore life bursts the limits of both logic and imagination. The glorious realities of the life to come can no more be accommodated to the pedestrian routines of earthly life than can butterflies be compared to caterpillars. Present earthly experience is entirely insufficient to forecast divine heavenly realities” (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 368). God’s power is making something entirely new. Now, for some in this room, this saying by Jesus may trouble you, because we have set our hope on eternal life merely extending the earthly pleasures we enjoy here. When we consider not being married, we almost feel like we may be deprived of some joy. But we have to set our minds on the glorious truth that in the resurrection, we will have everything we need for perfect joy and happiness. We will have the joy of Christ. We will experience the full beauty of His glory that will satisfy our hearts in ways we can’t imagine. But we will also have perfect love and harmony between all of our brothers and sisters in Christ, including our spouses and families, that will swallow up the marital bliss we enjoy on this earth. Are these glories what your heart longs for? In Jesus’ response to their ridiculous question, He shows how pride led to their foolish ignorance that kept them from knowing God and seeing the beauty of the resurrection. Family, pride comes in various forms. It isn’t always a harsh arrogance. Sometimes it is believing we know what will bring us optimal joy better than God. In that pride, we fail to see the beauty of God’s truth and ways. Don’t let pride lead you to foolish ignorance like the Sadducees did. This leads us into the second truth given to us in this confrontation. This truth is found in verses 26-27, showing us that,

God’s Power Accomplishes His Promises to those He Covenants with

To solidify their error and guide them towards understanding, Jesus goes to the Pentateuch to reveal how even it expresses the certainty of the resurrection. Look at verses 26-27, “And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’?”

He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.” Once again, Jesus asks them a question to point out what they failed to see within the book of Moses. He draws their attention to a specific passage where God declares who He is to Moses, showing the very covenant keeping character of God is dependent on the truth of the resurrection. God’s name, “I AM,” communicates He is the living and always present God of the people He is in covenant with. The reminder that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob speaks to His steadfast love and faithfulness of keeping His promises to them. Church, here is what we need to understand about God’s promises. They will fail to be true if His people simply die and have no hope of eternal life. Think back to the garden and the fall of man. The punishment of our sin is the certainty of death, both spiritually and physically. That is the consequence for sin. For Him to keep steadfast love and faithfulness to His people, death must be dealt with. God, in His abundant wisdom and grace, made a covenant with His people, contingent on His character alone to remove the sting of death. Praise God, that covenant has been realized in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and extends to those who are joined to Him in faith. The book of Hebrews tells us the Old Testament saints are joined to that covenant because they looked forward to Christ’s death and resurrection, and we are joined to it because we look back to Christ’s death and resurrection. No one is saved apart from faith in Jesus Christ. No one from the past, the present, or in the future. And those who have faith in Christ are now counted among the living, because even though they may fall asleep now, they are not dead. They have merely departed to be with Christ and await the day of the future resurrected bodies, because our God, “is not God of the dead, but of the living.” Do you see what Jesus is saying here? God’s promises rest in the power of the resurrection because that conquers our final enemy. If there is no resurrection of the dead, God’s covenant keeping character is in question. So, Jesus cannot leave this question unchecked. Therefore, He ends with another emphatic saying, “You are quite wrong.” They must see the error of their ways and recognize that God’s power accomplishes His promises to those He covenants with. Now, the primary application of this passage is to see the authority and wisdom of Jesus and believe in the certainty of the resurrection. Do you see and believe these things? Does the authority and wisdom of Jesus leave you in awe of who He is? Have you dealt with the question of what will happen after death? Is your hope placed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the certainty of the resurrection? If not, turn from the error of your ways today and trust in Jesus Christ. That is the main take away from this passage. But I want to consider some additional implications of what this passage calls us to do. First,

1) Search the Scriptures to Know God Fully

The Sadducees error highlights one we can easily make as well. We can fail to see the design of the Scriptures is to help us to know our God. When we fail to study God’s Word to see what it tells us about Him, we fall into the same trap as the Sadducees and create a god that meets our expectations and fits within our understanding. Ultimately, God is beyond our understanding. In Isaiah 55:8-9, the Lord says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Yet, the Scriptures also show us God can be known by how He has revealed Himself to us. And the primary way He has revealed Himself is through His Word. Our culture today wants to claim you don’t need the scriptures to know God, you can just find Him in creation, other people, or your own understanding. Yes, God has clearly revealed Himself in creation, as Romans 1 says, we see His power and divine nature in the creative order. But, He has revealed Himself more intimately through His Word, both Jesus Christ as the eternal Word, and the Scriptures as His written Word. When we don’t dig into this Word to discover who He is, we will inevitably end up believing in a god of our imagination who bends and molds to our understanding, not the true God of creation. Search the Scriptures to know God fully. Second,

2) Humbly Trust in God's Power to Accomplish His Promises

It takes humility to trust in God's promises, because they require His power to accomplish them. God doesn't promise something and then make it contingent on our power. He promises and He provides, so the glory belongs to Him alone. The first promise we have to humbly trust is the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:3-5 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." In mercy, God has caused those who have faith in Christ to be born again to a living hope. He promises all who place their faith in Jesus a future salvation and inheritance that is being guarded for us by His power. The Christian faith doesn't propose any way that we earn this salvation but rather that God's grace secures it, provides it, and guards it for us. He does the work, and we trust in Him. This takes humility because we bring nothing to the table and do nothing but trust in His power to keep His promise. If you haven't yet, or have lost sight of that, humbly trust in God's power to accomplish His promises today. We are also called to trust in Him to keep us and use every trial we face in this life for His glory and our good. Peter continues in 1 Peter 1:6-9, saying, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Peter tells us the growth of our faith is precious because it brings honor and glory to Jesus Christ. He also says that our continued trust through the testing of our faith, our continued love and growing joy in Christ, is part of the process of reaching the salvation of our souls. It takes humility to trust that God is accomplishing His purposes and keeping His promises when we face various trials. And the more you contemplate the resurrection and know the glory that awaits us, the more you will joyfully bear under whatever trials this world brings. Humbly trust in God's power to accomplish His promises.

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, lean into God's grace through this passage today. Search your hearts for any ways you are denying the Scriptures presentation of our God. Seek to know His power and trust in Christ alone for everything you need. Humble yourselves before Him and He will exalt you. Respond as you are led. As always you are welcome to come and kneel before the Lord or get prayer from a member of our prayer team, who you will find worshipping on the front row or bottom of the stairs in the back with lanyards on. Would you pray with me as we seek God's grace together?