

Jason Upchurch - Mark 12:18-27 - The Good News of the Resurrection

This morning we come to the third confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders in the Temple.

Remember this is Tuesday morning of Passion week. This is still the day after Jesus cleared out the Temple of the money changers. I know I keep reminding you of that, but there is so much happening in this one day it is easy to lose perspective. Mark is 16 chapters long and 2 of the 16 are dedicated to just one day of teaching - that's how critical this section is. Sometimes it's easy to get lost in the flow of things.

And so far this Tuesday morning Jesus has confronted the chief priests and scribes and elders about authority and he soundly condemned their authority. In fact he confounded them so much that they just went away and sent another group to try to trap Jesus - the Pharisees and Herodians. They hated each other but worked together to try to trap Jesus about whether or not we should pay taxes. He confounded them and they went away.

You ever seen those cheesy king fu movies where the main character just knocks out enemy after enemy with effortless punches and kicks? That's kind of what happening here. All these groups come to Jesus and he just knocks them out of the park.

If you've been counting, so far Jesus has destroyed the arguments of 5 different groups of people. All these groups have distinct beliefs and views. They would never all work together. But they do against Jesus because they hate God. They want control and power and they don't want Jesus to challenge them.

Well, the next group is no different. Here we have the 6th group to challenge Jesus: the Sadducees. We actually don't know a lot about the Sadducees. This is the only time they are mentioned in Mark's gospel and they are only mentioned a few times outside of Mark. We don't know exactly when they started or why. Most of these groups started during the silent years between the OT and NT and it's not always clear what their origin was.

The name Sadducee is likely derived from the name Zadok who was a high priest during the time of David and Solomon. The idea might have been to name themselves after this priest to make a historical name connection to the great priests of old.

The Sadducees were the wealthiest of the religious leaders in Jerusalem and made up a lot of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin. The High Priest and the high priest's family were all Sadducees.

Now, theologically, they were as liberal as could be. If they were alive today these would be the professors at Duke University and Harvard and Princeton. They have a lot of influence and are raving liberal.

Rabbit trail here: What do we mean by "liberal" theologically?

When someone is a liberal theologically it means they deny what the Bible clearly says in some way. They don't take what it says at face value, they want to reimagine it's content, they deny who actually wrote it or they deny that it is God's Word.

1) Maybe they deny what the Bible clearly teaches. Usually the dead giveaway of liberalism is a denial that Jesus is the only way of salvation. That's too narrow for liberals. "What about all those loving Hindus or the kind hearted Muslims or the people in Africa who have never heard of Jesus?" Liberals can't imagine those people would actually go to hell. That wouldn't be loving according to them. The problem is that's exactly what the Bible teaches. Every single person is a sinner and deserves death and wrath, the Bible says we have to understand and believe the gospel to be saved.

2) Connected to that: they usually deny that there is hell. Eternal, conscious punishment for sin. That's another dead giveaway that someone has been sucked into the tractor beam of liberalism. "God is loving and would never send anyone to hell, certainly not forever." So what they're doing is saying that they have a better understanding of God's love than the Bible does. And since hell and love - to them - are incompatible, there can be no hell. They never deny God's love, they always deny hell.

3) From there they deny that sin is sinful. The Bible says they're sin, but liberals know better know better. They'll says fornication is not a sin, adultery is not a sin, homosexuality is not a sin, greed is not a sin, on and on. And they usually justify it by pointing to something else. "Well, you say this is a sin, but what about this other thing over here?" That's a classic liberal dodge. They don't actually defend their position, they throw out a red herring and try to get us to go for it.

They'll deny reality of the roles of men and women - liberal churches almost always have or promote women pastors or leaders.

They'll also say that we need to put more importance on the words of Jesus than the words of Paul or Peter because Jesus's words are more important. They'll deny that Paul wrote his letters or that John wrote his or that Moses wrote the Pentateuch.

Really what they are doing is standing in judgment over the Word of God. They know better. That's the Sadducees. They denied all kinds of things. They denied the resurrection. That's the whole situation here. They denied that angels existed. They only affirmed the first 5 books of the Bible - the Pentateuch - all the rest they rejected. They denied final judgment and that souls live on after death.

And, interestingly, Josephus (the ancient Jewish historian) says they denied the idea that God has any control over men's actions at all, they were the hyper-Arminians of their day. They loved the idea of what we would call "free will" and that God was basically not involved in the affairs of men at all (Joseph. Wars. 2:8:14). "The Sadducees, they take away fate, and say there is no such thing, and that the events of human affairs are not at its disposal; but they suppose all our actions are in our own power, so that we are the cause of what is good, and receive what is evil from our own folly" (Joseph. Antiq 13:5:9)

The old Calvinist/Arminian debate has been going on way before Jesus.

In any case, these were the guys in control of the Temple. And they come to Jesus with a scenario to trap him. It's called a *reductio ad absurdum* argument. For you logic people, the idea is to show how your opponents view, if taken to a logical conclusion, is absurd. You are reducing your opponent's view to absurdity.

And they do that with this interesting scenario. **Read 18-23**

So these guys don't believe in the resurrection. They know Jesus does. So what they want to show is the absurdity of this scenario if it were played out like Jesus apparently believes.

Now the situation they scheme up is based on what is called levirate marriage. In Latin, Levir means brother-in-law. And Moses talks about this in **Deut. 25:5-10**. Turn there for a minute.

So levirate marriage is the idea that if the oldest brother in the family gets married and then dies before he and his wife have kids, then the younger brother is obligated to marry the widowed sister in law and have kids with her. Now, this is really the coolest and weirdest law in the whole OT. **Read 5-10**

That's...rowdy. What's the big principle here? The big principle here is that when a woman marries into a family she is now part of the tribe of the man. Women are grafted in to the man's family. We signify that in our culture by the woman taking the last name of the man. She's part of their clan now. That's why it's so odd when a feminist doesn't take the last name of her husband; it's a rejection of the God designed union. Ironically, she's still has a man's last name: her father's. The man never joins his wife's clan.

So if your brother gets married and dies and leaves a widow and no offspring that's a tragedy. It's a tragedy because 1) he died and that's obviously sad. He died at a young age likely just after they were married.

It's also sad 2) because he left no heirs. His line is now cut off permanently. This doesn't seem to be such a big deal in our culture, though I think it's a bigger deal than people let on. But there are no heirs to this man. His memory and legacy are wiped away forever because he has no children.

And 3) the woman is now vulnerable. She a widow which means she's not a virgin and therefore not as desirable. Many times young widows in ancient times turned to prostitution because no one wanted them as a wife. And maybe there were no kids because she's barren.

So God solved this whole situation with one law. Younger brothers, listen up. If the older brother died, it was obligated of the younger brother - assuming he wasn't married - to take his sister in law as his wife. And have children with her. The first son would bear the name of the dead brother.

Now, functionally, the son would always know his real dad as his dad. But symbolically they would serve to represent the life and legacy of the older son. Lives and legacies matter to God.

What if the younger brother refuses? He is absolutely dishonored in Israel in the sight of his family and city. He is publicly shamed and cursed by his sister in law with this whole sandal thing.

We have this recorded happening a couple times in the OT. In Genesis if you remember Judah's son Er married Tamar. But Er was wicked and God killed him. Judah then told his next son Onan to go marry his sister in law and he did, but he spilled his seed on the ground - I'll let you parents explain that. So God killed Onan.

The other notable time is in the book of Ruth. Remember Boaz wanted to marry Ruth but there was a redeemer closer to Ruth than him? Well that guy didn't want to marry Ruth so he went through the whole sandal routine and Boaz married Ruth and they had Obed. Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered who? David the king.

This was a grace of God to provide for offspring, to protect vulnerable women, and to ensure those who died young were not forgotten.

So back in **Mark** the Sadducees use this scenario to create a crazy absurdity. **Read 20-23**

So what they're trying to get Jesus to admit is that if there is a resurrection then we've got 7 brothers all married to the same woman. That would be offensive. Technically that's called polyamory - multiple husbands. And also incestuous because they're all family.

Now, we don't know where they cooked up this argument. There is a similar story about this in the Apocryphal book of Tobit so it might be connected to that. But according to Josephus, the Sadducees loved to argue so they likely had a bunch of different "gotchya" questions. This was probably one of them.

And most of us have dealt with gotchya questions. "Why does a good all powerful God allow evil to exist?" "Who made God?" "How can you worship a God who ordered people to be killed in the OT?"

It's good to have answers to those by the way. But this was probably their ace up the sleeve question that they'd toss out to anyone who believed in resurrection, which most of the Jews did.

Now, Jesus's answer is brilliant. But let me say a few things before we unpack it. The resurrection is really the focal point of the Christian faith. Not just Jesus's resurrection, though obviously we believe that Jesus died and physically rose again.

But our resurrection is fundamental to the Bible as well. It's just as fundamental as Jesus's resurrection. See, the Christian faith doesn't believe that a Christian dies and goes to heaven like a ghost forever and that's it. No, the Bible teaches clearly that there is coming a day when Jesus will return and on that day all bodies will be raised from the dead; both believers and unbelievers.

The souls of unbelievers will be reunited to their bodies and cast into the lake of fire where they will burn and decay forever and ever. It will be a physical, conscious torment in their bodies forever.

The souls of believers will also be reunited to our bodies when Jesus comes. Our bodies will rise from the grave, from the dust, and be reunited to our souls. And our bodies will be glorious bodies. And we will live on a new earth - a glorified earth - forever and ever.

So when you go outside and play in the dirt, that very same dirt will be there in the new earth purged of all stain of sin. The face you look at in the morning in the mirror - that's the face you'll look at for all eternity. But it will be a glorious face free of spots and acne and age and wear and tear.

1 Cor. 15:42-49: Paul says our bodies will be imperishable (won't die or decay); they'll be glorious (shiny, beautiful, awesome - reflecting the beauty of the glorious Christ); they will be spiritual in the sense of purely Spirit powered; and they will be powerful (no more going to the gym or throwing out your back).

Now we don't know exactly what all that means or exactly how it all works. But **Phil 3:21** says our lowly bodies - sorry guys, our bodies are all lowly - will be like Jesus's glorious body.

Daniel 12:2-3: 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. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

So there's a glory, a shiny-ness like stars that we will radiate in the new earth.

All this is absolutely fundamental to the Christian faith. And, frankly, the faith of the people of God prior to Jesus. To deny the future resurrection is to deny the faith. And it functionally denies that even Jesus rose. Jesus's resurrection and our resurrection are inseparably linked together.

Now, Jesus responds to this silly "gotchya" question with 5 statements. All of which are both factual and encouraging to us.

1) They're wrong because they don't know the Scripture. **Read 24**

Now, this would have been somewhat offensive to the Sadducees. "You guys don't even know your Bible." This is offensive because they are likely some of the most biblically literate people at the time. These guys had likely memorized most of the Pentateuch. They would have known the Bible very well.

But Jesus actually calls them out. The reason they deny this fundamental truth is that they don't actually know the Bible. They claim they know it, they know the words. But they are wrong. And Jesus tells them they are wrong.

This is true even today with many people who know exactly what the Bible says. What it says about salvation, what it says about creation, what it says about men and women, what it says about repentance, what it says about forgiveness.

They know the words. They know what it plainly teaches. But they deny it or excuse it and they are wrong. And, by the way, it's okay to tell them they are wrong. The Bible does actually contain truth and we can know that truth.

There's a lot of people who want to punt and say "well, that's just your opinion." No, that's actually what the Bible says. It's clear. And 2,000 years of Christian history are also clear.

The old saying: "If it's new, it's not true. And if it's true it's not new."

The Sadducees thought they had learned something novel, but in reality they didn't really even know the Bible they claimed to master.

2) They're wrong because they don't believe God is powerful. **Read 24**

Another reason that people deny what the Bible plainly says is that they don't actually believe God is powerful enough to do what he says he's done in his word.

They read the words, and they don't believe that that could have happened.

Did God really drown the whole world in a flood minus 8 people? That's really hard to believe.

Did God really get Sarah pregnant at 90 years old? I mean, at 90 it's hard to keep up with more than 2 bingo cards. Pregnant, really?

Did the Red Sea part? Did God really sustain 2 million people in the desert for 40 years? Did the walls of Jericho really come down? Did an axe head really float in the water? Did 3 men really survive being thrown into a fiery furnace? Did Jonah really spend 3 days and nights in the heart of a fish? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Will we really rise from the dead?

The Bible plainly teaches these things. It is without controversy that this is what the Bible says. There's no "well, that's just your opinion" on it. That's just what it says.

You know why people deny these things? Because they don't actually believe that God is powerful enough to do them. "God couldn't have done that, that doesn't make any sense. All the secular God-hating scientists say that it couldn't have happened." Do you think?

Do we believe in an all-powerful God or not? The answer is "of course." If God is all-powerful then it's not hard to believe in anything we read in the Scripture. Certainly not the resurrection.

Paul even uses this logic in Acts when he's talking to Agrippa, the ruler. He's talking about how, yeah, he proclaims that Jesus rose from the dead. So what? Big deal. Paul says, "Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?"

It's airtight logic. This is God we're talking about, he can do whatever he wants, including raising the dead.

Acts 26:8

3) In glory there is no man-to-woman marriage. Read 25

Now, I chose my words carefully. There is no man-to-woman marriage. Because in heaven there is actually marriage. You know who's married? Every human in heaven to who? Jesus.

See marriage on earth just points to a greater reality in heaven: the true marriage of Jesus to the church. That's why when a spouse dies the widow or widower is free to remarry. Because marriage on earth is just a temporary picture, a temporary drama, of the real thing that is played out in heaven for all eternity.

Now, I joke with my wife that although we won't be married in heaven, it'd be nice to be neighbors. And that's true. But understand that whatever we're going to experience in heaven is much better than even the best of what we experience here on earth in marriage.

We're not going to be up in heaven thinking, "Yeah, but back on earth there was sex and that seems better." No, the glory and pleasure and joy of heaven is going to be a million times better than that. It's going to be better than your best vacation, best memories, best intimacy multiplied by a million. We're not going to be in heaven and it be a bummer we're not married to our spouse.

No we're going to get to heaven and we'll be married to Jesus and it will be amazing.

4) Here's an interesting truth: Angels don't marry. Read 24

Now, this is interesting because it is brand new information. This is brand new revelation that we never had before this time. How does Jesus know angels don't marry in heaven? Well, he's from heaven so there's that.

Interestingly, this passage is rather insightful on a lot of levels. We don't know a lot of about the angelic realm. We know some. It's interesting that angels long to look into our salvation and at the same time we long to understand angels better too. We're God's creatures that really don't get to know each other all that much in the here and now.

What we do know is that angels are male. Or at least all the ones in the Bible we see are male. They're given male names, male pronouns. And if we look at all the rest of creation there's one defining reason why creatures are considered male: it's their biology. So it's safe to say there's some kind of masculine biology with angels.

That's part of the reason I think the Genesis 6 sons of God were fallen angels who procreated with women. They have the biology.

Are there female angels? Well, maybe. The Bible never mentions any but it also doesn't deny their existence either. We don't know.

What we do know is that there is no angelic marriage. Why not? Well, Paul says that the mystery of marriage is that from the very beginning God made marriage to be a secret picture of Christ and the church. It was a mystery in the OT, but it's been revealed to us now.

And since angels don't get salvation like humans do, it makes sense that they don't participate in marriage like humans do. They can't reflect the gospel like we do. The gospel of forgiveness of sins doesn't apply to angels like it does to humans.

So our existence in heaven and later when we rise from the dead and live on the new earth is like angels. There is no marriage to others. For us, it's because we'll experience what human marriage was always pointing to: Jesus.

5) Moses affirms resurrection. Read 25-27

This is really the kill shot against the Sadducees. Jesus has already shredded them. They don't know the Scripture, they don't see the power of God. They don't understand the nature of angels or what heaven is actually going to be like.

And, oh yeah, by the way Moses indicates resurrection in one of the most notable passages in all the OT: The burning bush story.

Remember that? Moses has run away from Egypt. He's wandering around the Sinai peninsula and God appears to him in a burning bush that is not consumed by the fire. Who's speaking from the bush? It's Yahweh.

But he makes a technical point on the grammar used when God was talking to Moses. *I am* the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. What does that tell us? It tells us they're still alive. They're not gone. If they were gone, God would have said "I was the God of these guys."

No, God says "I am, right now, the God of these 3 men." This flew in the face of the Sadducees who believed that when someone died their soul just blinked out of existence.

And God says it to the only person the Sadducees view as authoritative: Moses.

Listen, when a believer dies they go immediately into the presence of the Lord.

Paul says to be absent from the body is to be present with who? The Lord.

Jesus says to the thief on the cross "Today you will be with who?" With me in paradise.

Paul says in **1 Thess. 4:13-18** that when Jesus comes back he's bringing everyone who has fallen asleep - everyone who has died.

If they're still alive in spirit, then they will be raised. The Sadducees were quite wrong.

The resurrection is the defining doctrine of Christianity. Not only does it establish who we are: we're baptized as a symbol of death and resurrection. But our weekly calendar revolves around resurrection. We meet on the day Jesus rose.

It's all our hope. And just as sure as God raised Jesus from the dead, one day we will rise too in glory and in power forever with the Lord.

Pray