

## He is Lord of the Living

- Mark 12:18-27
- We are in the middle of seven conflicts Jesus had with the religious leaders of the day, and it is just getting more fun all the time. I couldn't help but think about what used to be called championship wrestling as I read the story today. It reminded me of Saturday afternoons at my grandfather's house as a teenager, watching my grandfather watch wrestling on TV. I would watch him half the time because he was almost as entertaining as Wahoo McDaniel and Haystacks Calhoun. My granddad would grunt and flinch and move and throw up his arms to prevent a choke hold. He was locked in. And back in those days, I don't know what it's like now, there was a lot of tag team wrestling, and that meant that when Tony Garea got tired, he would reach out and tag Haystacks, who would lumber into the ring. He couldn't climb up and come off the top rope, but at 6'11" and 600 lbs, it didn't matter.
- We have seen the Sanhedrin enter the ring with Jesus to try and throw him down, and instead they run into a man who makes Stone Cold Steve Austin look like Tiny Tim. They crawl off the mat and tag the Pharisees and the Herodians, who come in with back slaps and fake kisses, trying to lull Jesus into a trap, but he sends them flying with a simple question. They run out and tag the Sadducees who enter the ring with what appears to be supreme confidence that they will defeat Jesus and claim the championship belt. OK, if you don't resonate with the wrestling metaphor, think of it as a warfare tactic. The enemy comes in waves, one after another, hitting you with a second and a third before you can even recover from the first assault. And we know that what is happening here is not make believe; it is spiritual warfare. Let's look at this passage today under three main points: The Puzzle, the Problem, and the Principles.
- **The Puzzle (verses 18-23)**
- The Sadducees, unlike the Pharisees, did not believe in the resurrection. That's why they were sad you see. Like atheists today, they are known best for what they do NOT believe. But there were other differences. The Pharisees believed in divine sovereignty, the Sadducees believed in human free will alone. The Pharisees believed in all of the Old Testament and the oral traditions; the Sadducees accepted only the Torah, the first five books of Moses. So, we can see that the Sadducees come with two goals in mind. They want to trap Jesus into acknowledging that there really is no resurrection from the dead. And accomplishing that will put the Pharisees in their place as well. They come with a puzzle for Jesus about a man and his seven brothers. The man dies and leaves his wife childless. The principle of levirate marriage, explained in Deuteronomy 25, was that in order for that man's lineage to continue, one of his brothers would marry his sister-in-law and have a son with her who would carry on his father's name. And if he refused to marry his brother's widow, she would come to him, in front of witnesses, take off his sandal and spit in his face and say, "So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house." It is softened a little by the time we get to the story of Ruth and Boaz. He was not a brother to her deceased husband, so Boaz had to go to someone who was a brother or at least closer in relation than he was. It could be an uncle or a cousin if there was no brother. When Boaz finds him, the man says he does

not want to marry Ruth and hands his sandal to Boaz as a testimony. This was levirate marriage, and the custom was not meant to encourage polygamy or sexual immorality but “to preserve honor and property within a family line.”

- But! The puzzle presented here is extreme to the point that it becomes ridiculous. It is an example of “reduction to the absurd,” which is an attempt to disprove a basic belief on the basis that its logical implications are absurd. What the Sadducees were trying to do was put Jesus in a position where he had to admit that there could not possibly be anything after death, otherwise, this woman would have seven husbands, even eight, in heaven! No doubt the Sadducees had used this illustration before in their arguments with the Pharisees, and no one could prove them wrong. Until now. Jesus will show that their assumptions, not the doctrine of the resurrection, were false.
- **The Problem (verses 24-27)**
- Jesus comes off the top rope, but he doesn’t need a chair or a cane or even his fists. He hits them with a question that exposes the problem in their understanding. “Is not this the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?” The word for “wrong” is *planan*, from which we get the word, planet. It means to wander off the track, or to be led astray. If Jupiter wanders out of its orbit and into ours, we are in trouble. And if we wander off the path of the Scriptures, we are in even more trouble. Jesus says there are two problems with their conclusion. First, they do not know the Scriptures, and second, they do not know the power of God. This would have been a shock and considered an audacious accusation, akin to “claiming that Wall Street knows nothing of finance!” (James Edwards). “Scripture (the Torah) and power (the Sanhedrin) were precisely the Sadducees’ stock-in-trade.” But Jesus says that what they think they know best, they actually know least. Listen saints, we can read the Scriptures only to find places where we agree and feel vindicated, and know a lot and very little at the same time, as a result.
- Jesus corrects their assumption about marriage, first by speaking to the *manner* and then to the *facts* of the resurrection. (verse 25) The manner of the resurrection includes the truth that in heaven there will be no marriage, but we will be like the angels. That doesn’t mean wings or harps or any other images of angels that we might conjure up. It means we will not be married in heaven then, just as angels in heaven are not married now. The only angel you will be married to, men and women, is the one you are sitting beside, the perfect partner you have been given for a short time here on the earth. But in heaven, she will be your sister, men, and he will be your brother, women.
- Then Jesus corrects their false belief and speaks to the *facts* of the resurrection. (verse 26). And he does it by appealing to the Torah, the foundation of their faith and the only part of the Old Testament that they accepted. And he says, as he has done before, “Have you not read?” Jesus then proves the resurrection by taking them to the story of Moses standing before the burning bush in Exodus 3, where God says, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (Ex 3:6) The promises of God are not for this life only. God did not make promises to men and women of God who would die and disappear. God makes promises to people who will be raised from the dead. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob had died hundreds of years before Moses stood before the living God, but they were not dead! Jesus said of his Father, “He is not God of the dead,

but of the living.” If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are dead, as the Sadducees believe, then the promises he made to them were good for only as long as they lived, and God’s promises died with them. It means Jacob lied when he said to one of his sons, “The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” (Deut. 33:27) It would mean that Jesus lied when he told Mary and Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” (John 11:25) It would mean that Paul lied when he said, “And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.” (1 Cor. 6:14) Of course, we know that not long after this discussion with the Sadducees, Jesus would demonstrate this truth by being raised from the dead and appearing to the disciples and more than 500 people at one time.

- Jesus ends his answer to the Sadducees the way he started it: “You are quite wrong.” Again, the word is planan, and the meaning is, “You are way off track.” Jesus answers their false assumption with truth. When someone is way off track in their thinking about essential doctrines, **we do them no favor by ignoring their error.** The only hope of correcting it is to expose it and speak the truth.
- **The Principles**
- There are at least 5 powerful principles I think we can extrapolate from this text today.
- **Marriage is for this age but it is sacred, designed by God for the flourishing of all people who enter into it.**
- **Communion with God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit begin in this life and will be fully realized in the next.**
- **Resurrection is reality. All people will be resurrected, some to eternal life and some to eternal judgment. (Matthew 25:46)**
- **All who reject the plain truths of God’s Word are quite wrong, off the track, in a dangerous place.** Paul wrote that people like this “will not endure sound teaching...and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” (2 Timothy 4:4)
- **“Those who know the Scriptures and the power of God (as Jesus himself did) will always be able to give an answer for the hope he has in the Gospel.” -1 Peter 3:15 (Sinclair Ferguson)**
- **Prayer**
- **GREET one another!**