

# Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”  
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,  
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”  
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

## **You Know Neither The Scriptures Nor The Power Of God**

**April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

**Mark 12:18-27**

**Rev. Paul Carter**

### **Introduction:**

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Mark 12:18; that's on page 848 in your pew Bibles. It's always a little tricky jumping back into a series after Easter – our sense of chronology is all messed up as we stepped outside the timeline of Mark in order to do our Holy Week readings from John – but now we're jumping back into Mark and in these stories that we are looking at Jesus is in Jerusalem during the last week of his life before the cross.

With your Bible open let me remind you what you are looking at. We are in the middle here of 3 conflict stories. All the leaders of Jerusalem band together in an attempt to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the crowd while simultaneously gathering evidence that they hope to use against him in his eventual trial. The first conflict is with the Pharisees and Herodians – we see that one in Mark 12:13 – that one was about taxes and the authority of the state. The second one is the one we are going to look at today – it is with the Sadducees – basically the aristocratic ruling class – and its about Scripture, authority and everlasting life. The third one is with the scribes – you can see that one starting at verse 28. The conclusion to this entire section is given in verse 34:

And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. (Mark 12:34 ESV)

Don't play gotcha games with Jesus – he will win – that's the moral of this story. But of course each story within the story is teaching some very important things as well and we will turn our attention to some of those things as we find them today in verses 18-27. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question, saying, 19 "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. 20 There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. 21 And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. 22 And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. 23 In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife." 24 Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? 25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 26 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'? 27 He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong." (Mark 12:18-27 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

This is a bit of a tricky passage to preach on for the simple reason that the question we all want to ask isn't really the point of the text. We want to know whether there will be marriage in heaven; will there be sex in heaven; will there be children; will there be diapers and will I have to share my mansion with someone else – those are the sorts of questions people ask whether or not they are the point of the text – and of course they are not.

However if we don't make some attempt at answering those questions then we will be terribly distracted and unable to focus on what Jesus is actually saying. So let's take a minute or two and answer the question we are all dying to ask.

### **The Question We Are All Dying To Ask: Will There Be Marriage In Heaven?**

The question comes up because of what Jesus says in verse 25:

For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. (Mark 12:25 ESV)

That's a bit of a hand grenade isn't it? It's hard to move past that onto the point of the text. So let's stop and answer the question: will there be marriage in heaven?

The answer to that question is a rather complicated 'no'.

There will not be marriage per se in heaven – in the eternal kingdom - because marriage is a social contract appropriate to the stage of human life that is common now. Marriage is a covenant that essentially binds men and women into an exclusive sexual relationship for 4 basic purposes:

1. Friendship
2. Witness
3. Holiness
4. Procreation.

That's what marriage was originally for but the circumstances in heaven and in the eternal kingdom will be so different from those prevailing here on earth that the institution itself will be logically redundant.

For one thing we will all be enjoying perfect friendship with God in Christ – not to mention perfect friendship with one another. So we will not be alone in any sense. And we'll all be Christians – so the need to bear witness through the forms of our relationships will have passed. And then thirdly – and marvelously – in the eternal kingdom we will no longer be subject to sinful desire. Remember, marriage is a BINDING covenant – it is intended to put pressure on us – religious and social – towards right behavior and away from wrong behavior. Well to state the obvious, in our glorified bodies and in the absence of temptation – we will not need such pressure anymore – we won't need to be bound to our duty – we will obey God from the heart.

And then finally there is the fact that we won't be procreating in the eternal kingdom – all of God's people will be there when the Kingdom of God is fully consummated. Therefore the rationale for the institution of marriage will have been substantially removed.

But that isn't to say that it won't be replaced by something else. It may well be and if it is then we can trust that it will be better. James Edwards puts it this way:

Present earthly experience is entirely insufficient to forecast divine heavenly realities: we can no more imagine

heavenly existence than an infant *in utero* can imagine a Beethoven piano concerto or the Grand Canyon at sunset.<sup>1</sup>

The eternal kingdom is going to be different – but it’s going to be different in ways that are better, fuller and more glorious than all the things that came before. It is going to be an altogether different order of reality - and that is almost certainly what Jesus meant when he said that we are going to be like the angels. He is not saying that angels are sex-less – as in lacking gender – there is no indication in the Bible that angels lack gender – he is just saying that like the angels we will live in a different dimension of reality. A reality without sin. A reality determined entirely by the presence and goodness and blessing of Almighty God. And it will be so different – so much better – that it will require totally different ways of thinking, acting and relating.

That’s all that Jesus is saying with respect to marriage in the eternal Kingdom of God. He is answering the question of the Sadducees – which was about marriage – by saying, your question is essentially irrelevant. It fails to address the radical discontinuity that will characterize our life with God in the age to come.

So that is the answer to the question we are eager to ask and now we need to address our attention to what the text is actually talking about.

### **What The Text Is Actually Trying To Say:**

Once we get passed that giant distraction noodle we are ready to deal with the message of the text and thankfully, it is reasonably easy to understand.

The Sadducees are trying to position Jesus in terms of his doctrine of Scripture. Just like in our day there was a huge controversy in Jesus’ day about the right way of thinking about Holy Scripture. They were wrestling – just like the church is wrestling today – with the question: what texts are authoritative and what texts are merely “interesting” and “useful”. The Sadducees had a smaller Bible than the Pharisees. Dennis Nineham explains:

“They took their stand on the Pentateuch, and though they did not, as has sometimes been suggested, deny the validity of the other Old Testament books, they did reject the various extra-canonical writings and traditions which

---

<sup>1</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 368.

the Pharisees and their supporters produced and accepted; and along with these they rejected the new beliefs they contained, particularly belief in eternal life, angels, spirits, and foreordination of fate.”<sup>2</sup>

So the Sadducees taught that you could only build a doctrine on a text from the first 5 books of the Old Testament – the Pentateuch. You could read the other books profitably but you couldn’t base a doctrine on anything you found there unless it could be supported by reference to a verse from the first 5 books. Basically they were saying the same thing that is being said by today’s Red Letter Christians – or at least certain versions of them. These Red Letter folks say that you can only be sure of things that Jesus actually said – in the Red Letters. The Old Testament provides useful historical background and the letters of Paul and Peter and John are certainly interesting in terms of telling us how the words of Jesus were being understood in the first generation – but in terms of authority – you really have to stick with the Red Letters.

The Sadducees are saying basically the same thing. You can read the Psalms if you like, you can read the Prophets, but when it comes to doctrine, you have to stick to the actual Words of Moses. That was their belief and as a result of their belief about Scripture they denied a bunch of doctrines that were believed by many other Jews at the time. The debate was fiercest with respect to the doctrine of the resurrection. The Pharisees felt so strongly that the Sadducees were wrong about this that they actually wrote a sort of curse that they directed towards them. They said:

“Whoever says that the resurrection of the dead cannot be deduced from the Torah has no part in the Age to Come.”<sup>3</sup>

So this was a very controversial issue – this was a heated debate and the Sadducees try to draw Jesus into it. They think that the doctrine of the resurrection is absolutely ridiculous. The Pharisees – and many Jews at street level – believed that after you died, if you were a true believer – you would be resurrected at some point to share in the Messianic Age. It would be like life now on the earth only without the ravages and corruption of sin. It would be sinless life under the perfect rule of Messiah – and everything that is here now would be there then just without the sin. So we have marriage now, we would have marriage then – minus the sin.

That’s what the Pharisees taught and the Sadducees thought that was ridiculous and to prove it they invent a story. It is a story based on the Law of Levirate Marriage as found in Deuteronomy

---

<sup>2</sup> D.E. Nineham, *Saint Mark*, The Penguin New Testament Commentaries. (London: Penguin Group, 1992), 318-319.

<sup>3</sup> The Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin X as cited in William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 427.

25. The law itself seems very odd to us but it was intended to keep land in the possession of families – so that it wouldn't be snatched up by rich outsiders and the people reduced to serfdom. It was also intended to allow widows to maintain an economic interest in the land – lest they be forced into prostitution. So it was a strange law that had very humane and compassionate motivations behind it and that made a great deal of sense in that time and culture - however odd it seems to us.

The story that the Sadducees invented has to do with a very unfortunate woman. She marries a man who dies before producing an heir. His brother takes her on as wife and attempts to produce an heir for the older brother but he too dies – and so on and so on into absurdity. The Sadducees having invented an absurd story now ask an absurd question:

In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.” (Mark 12:23 ESV)

You can almost hear them snickering behind their hands as they ask their question. They think they have Jesus snookered. Who can imagine anything more ridiculous than a poor woman with 7 husbands in eternity – that sounds more like hell than heaven doesn't it? Imagine all the laundry she would have to do – imagine all the nonsense she would have to put up with? If that's heaven I'm sure she'd rather go to hell – that's just too ridiculous to imagine – and therefore they reasoned, there mustn't be any sort of life after death after all.

And I think its actually quite surprising that Jesus doesn't just hit them over the head with a shovel here because what they're saying is completely juvenile and illogical. They are basically saying that if they can't think of a solution then the problem cannot exist – but of course that's ridiculous! Imagine saying that there can be no trees in the world higher than you are able to reach or no physical laws in the universe that you can't understand – that would make for a very small and very sad universe. That's childish – that's stupid really and it's a wonder that Jesus didn't hit them with a shovel.

But of course he didn't. He was very patient with them but he did speak to them very directly. He said:

“Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?” (Mark 12:24 ESV)

You aren't handling the Bible properly and as a result you have an inadequate view of God and an incoherent system of religion.

That's what he says.

They weren't dealing with the whole text and therefore they were missing important things about God – and he goes on to make it clear that they weren't even reading the portions of Scripture that they were reading correctly. Look at what he says; he says:

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'? (Mark 12:26 ESV)

Jesus destroys their argument by quoting to them from the portion of the Bible that they read. He quotes from the Pentateuch. He quotes from the Book of Exodus where God says to Moses – many years after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have all died – that he is the God of those people. He is still acting in a covenantal manner towards them – well how could he be doing that if they were dead? The fact that God says that to Moses in the Pentateuch proves that at that time Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were alive with God in some sense. And it means that God was still intent on keeping his promises to them – all of which implies that at some point they must rise from the dead.

That is the entire logic of Old Testament faith. What does the Pentateuch say? It says that Abraham:

believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6 ESV)

What does that mean?

It means that God made promises to Abraham – promises that were never fulfilled in Abraham's life – but Abraham believed those promises and that belief was credited to him as righteousness - as a right standing before God.

That's what faith is.

Faith is believing in who God is and what God says – even through death and disappointment.

That's faith.

In Hebrews 11 – the Faith Hall Of Fame – the Apostle says about Abraham:

By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:9–10 ESV)

Abraham was looking forward to the Celestial City – his faith wasn't about some grubby piece of land in Palestine – it was bigger than that – it went way beyond that – it went even beyond the grave. He was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is GOD.

That's faith.

And that's what you don't have, Jesus says, because you aren't reading the Bible correctly.

That's where he lands; the last words in the story are these:

You are quite wrong. (Mark 12:27 ESV)

The Greek literally means: “You are way off track”.

You have an inadequate view of God and an incoherent system of religion because you aren't reading the Bible correctly.

That's what this passage is saying: This passage is saying that an inadequate doctrine of Scripture leads to an inadequate vision of God and an incoherent system of faith.

**Response:**



Now what should we do with a passage like that? We don't read the Bible just to understand it – we read the Bible to be rebuked and edified and corrected and encouraged – so we want to know how this word from Jesus should affect us as God's people today. Let me suggest three ways.

## **1. It should encourage us toward whole Bible reading**

I think that is the most obvious encouragement in the text. Jesus says:

“Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?” (Mark 12:24 ESV)

The people in this story had no excuse for their bad theology. The truth they denied was clearly taught in the parts of the Bible they were not reading. Daniel 12 for example says:

And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. 2 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. 3 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. (Daniel 12:1–3 ESV)

Now how in the world could you read a passage like that and not believe in the doctrine of the resurrection?

Well of course you couldn't! But of course they weren't and that was the problem. That passage was in a part of the Bible that they didn't consider authoritative. So it was neglected by them and as a result they didn't understand God and they didn't understand the internal logic of their own faith.

Listen I think it is easy to spot modern versions of this error. How many Christians do you know who cherish ideas about God and the Christian faith that run directly counter to things that are taught in Scripture? And you wonder how could they believe that when the Bible clearly says the opposite?

Right?

How could people believe that real Christians are always going to be healthy, prosperous and

peaceful when Jesus himself said:

In the world you will have tribulation. (John 16:33 ESV)

How do they get there?

And how can people believe that there is no hell or that no one will have to stay in hell when the Bible says:

I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:12–15 ESV)

A place where Jesus said:

'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' (Mark 9:48 ESV)

So how come some Christians say that there is no hell and if there is you won't have to stay there – it won't be forever – how do they get there?

They get there by adopting a selective and arrogant doctrine of Scripture.

They get there by NOT reading some books of the Bible and by reading other books of the Bible poorly.

They get there the same way the Sadducees got there.

So, obviously let's not be like them.

Let's read the whole Bible – from cover to cover – and worship the God that we see.

I think that is the most obvious encouragement of the text – and the second is related to it. I think this story should warn us against dangerous and deceitful teachers.

## **2. It should warn us against dangerous and deceitful teachers**

The Sadducees were the party of the priesthood – they were supposed to be teaching the people the Word of God. And yet they grossly neglected their duty and became false shepherds and deceitful teachers failing even to read the Word of God.

Listen to me friends, few things in the Bible are more consistently taught than this: There will be false shepherds and deceitful teachers among the people of God. Jesus said this would be the case:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7:15 ESV)

Some people look like Christians – some people call themselves pastors – but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. Jesus said that. Jesus warned us about that – and he is warning us about that here - again - in this story. And I think we should heed that warning.

Thirdly and lastly, I think this story should remind us that we worship a promise keeping God.

## **3. It should remind us that we worship a promise keeping God**

That is the whole logic of faith that the Sadducees missed when they denied the resurrection of the dead. William Lane puts it this way, he says:

“If the death of the patriarchs is the last word of their history, there has been a breach of the promises of God guaranteed by the covenant, and of which the formula “the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob” is the symbol.”<sup>4</sup>

If the Patriarchs died and then just ceased to exist – which is what the Sadducees believed – then God is not a promise keeping God. God is a liar or powerless or something other than God. Because to state the obvious, the Patriarchs did not receive IN THIS LIFE the things that God promised to give them. They were always future. Abraham died owning only a single cave in which he buried his wife. Isaac died in a tent trying desperately to hold on to a couple of wells in

---

<sup>4</sup> William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 430.

the desert – Jacob died in Egypt living on the charity of his son – none of these men possessed what God said they would possess. But they all died in faith – believing that God would keep his promises even from beyond the grave.

That is FAITH.

Faith is believing that God keeps his promises EVEN THOUGH WE DIE. Therefore, God must raise us up if he is to be a promise keeping God. That's why Paul says:

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:19 ESV)

If there is no resurrection then our faith – Old Testament and New – doesn't make any sense at all – and our God isn't any good at all.

But thanks be to God – there is a resurrection from the dead. We know that because Jesus went first. That's what Easter is – proof that there is life beyond the grave. Proof that God is good and he keeps his promises. Proof that all the promises of God are YES and Amen in Jesus Christ. Jesus paid it all and Jesus HAS IT ALL and it will ALL be shared with us in the life and kingdom that is to come.

That is our faith!

That is our God!

And this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.