

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)*

When the Dead Rise

April 8th, 2018

Mark 12:18-27

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Introduction:

Good morning! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Mark 12.

The encounter we find in our text today is the second in a list of three challenges to Jesus’ authority. The Pharisees attempted to trap him in a political snare by luring him into a conversation about taxes, but their scheme was undone by Jesus’ remarkable wisdom. Now another religious group within Judaism – a group known as the Sadducees – comes with a trap of their own.

Before we read the text, I want to give you a brief portrait of the Sadducees. It might prove helpful to picture them as a lifeless, strongly conservative branch of Judaism. They held powerful positions in the synagogue and in society – they were something of a religious aristocracy – and thus, they did not readily welcome change. They held that the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Old Testament – was the final word on God’s revelation. They believed that the rest of the Old Testament was good and helpful, but if you want to get at the REAL truth then you will find that in books one to five.

This difference manifested itself in a debate over resurrection. The Sadducees claimed that there was no basis for such a belief in the Pentateuch and so they dismissed it as a novel invention. The

Pharisees on the other hand, along with most of the Jewish people of the day, were reading all of the Old Testament and recognized the numerous references to a final, physical resurrection.

This is the social context beneath the question that Jesus will be faced with in our text for this morning. The Sadducees knew that, if Jesus chose to take a stance on this controversial issue, he would split his base of followers. Look with me now at chapter 12. We will read from verse 18 to verse 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. ²⁰There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. ²¹And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. ²²And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. ²³In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.”

²⁴Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? ²⁵For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ²⁶And 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’? ²⁷He 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.

Our text today is not remarkably complicated. That being said, I suspect that there are many people in this room who have a big, distracting question running through their minds right now: Will there be marriage in heaven?

That is not the main point of today's text, but because it is a question that is frequently arises, I'd like to address it so that we can get that distraction out of the way. So, let's ask the question:

The Question We Are All Dying to Ask: Will There Be Marriage in Heaven?

I think that's a fair question. I happen to be rather fond of my wife, and I would love to spend an eternity as her husband. As R. T. France says:

“For those for whom marriage is the basis of the deepest joy and love on earth, this is a

hard saying.”¹

We are meant to enjoy marriage. It is a gift from God and it is good, amen? But if marriage is good and if marriage is from God then why does Jesus tell us in our text this morning that there will be no marriage in heaven?

There is no single verse that we can reference in order to answer this question, but I do think that we can come to a place of understanding if we keep two guiding premises in mind.

Premise 1: Marriage is a gift from God that meets specific needs in the human experience

Premise 2: We will experience a greater joy after the final resurrection than we have ever known in this life

Because those premises are true, I think we can safely say that whatever needs God addressed with marriage in this life, those needs will be met in another way in the age to come. So, let's step back and think about the purposes of marriage. I think we can make a strong biblical case that purposes of marriage are:

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

Friends, when find ourselves in the new Heavens and the new Earth glorifying God and enjoying Him forever, our need for friendship will be completely fulfilled. We were made to be in relationship with God and when that relationship is fully realized we will recognize that every other relationship we've ever experienced was just a tiny glimpse into the relationship we were made for. Our marriages won't need to be a testimony to the gospel because, in Heaven, everyone will be in right relationship with God. As the Apostle John wrote:

¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 472.

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. (Revelation 22:3 ESV)

Marriage is meant to keep us holy. Your spouse is God's gift to you to help guard against temptation and to spur you on toward holiness. But, in heaven, there will be no temptation and you will need no spurring on. The Apostle wrote:

And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor
and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest. (Hebrews 8:11 ESV)

And there will be no need for procreation in the new Heavens and the new Earth because all of God's people will already be there. Therefore, marriage will have served its purpose and, according to this text, it will be no more.

We need to move on to the real purpose of our text for today, but I just want to leave you with one final word: God is not going to hold out on you in Heaven. Our limited human minds are simply not able to comprehend how incredible Heaven will be. It's like trying to describe a sunset to a child in the womb. It's like trying to help a caterpillar understand how it will feel to fly. Know this: You will not spend a second in Heaven missing marriage. God has something infinitely better in store for you.

Now, let's turn our attention to the main purpose of our text for this morning. We will break it down into three sections: A divisive question, a rebuke and an answer. Let's unpack this text together.

Unpacking the Text

The first element we see in this story is:

1. A Divisive Question: Whose wife will she be?

I can't help but think that this Sadducee had used this argument before. The scenario he lays out is ridiculously complicated and it is meant to make Jesus' position on the resurrection look absurd. It reminds me of that kid in school that asks you in the middle of a big crowd in the school yard: "Well if God can do ANYTHING then can he create a rock so big that even he can't lift it?" He then looks at you with that "let's see you wiggle your way out of this one" look in his eye and turns to take a bow to the crowd. It's a set up. The trap has been laid and now the crowd watches for Jesus to fall into it.

The Sadducee is building his hypothetical scenario around an Old Testament command called Levirate marriage. Levirate marriage states that, if a man dies before giving his wife a son then his brother must marry the wife and impregnate her. This was put in place because land was passed down from fathers to sons. If a father died without an heir, the family would lose the land and the wife would become homeless. Thus, Levirate marriage was designed to keep families from losing their inherited land – to keep widows from losing their livelihood and succumbing to poverty. The Sadducee was using this law to build an extraordinary and convoluted scenario.

The conclusion of his argument is this: The hypothetical woman will now have seven husbands in heaven, so either God doesn't care about polygamy or the whole idea of resurrection is absurd. Either way, Jesus is going to be written off by a large section of the crowd.

The question was meant to make Jesus look like a fool, but this Sadducee hadn't yet received the memo: No one makes Jesus look like a fool. On the contrary, this question has revealed that the Sadducees hadn't really read and understood their Bibles. This brings us to the rebuke:

2. A Rebuke: You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God

As someone who has a really hard time disagreeing with others, I find this response to be a real wakeup call. Jesus doesn't wade into the conversation with a polite: "Ahh, I see why you might have come to that conclusion brother but, might you consider another alternative?" No, Jesus recognizes a theological error – namely, the denial of resurrection – and he confronts it head on. He tells these Sadducees: "You don't know your bibles and you don't know God!" Commentator James Edwards tells us:

The audacity of Jesus' accusation of the Sadducees would be like claiming that Wall Street knows nothing of finance! Scripture (the Torah) and power (the Sanhedrin) were precisely the Sadducees' stock-in-trade, the two matters in which they majored. In magisterial authority, Jesus asserts that what the Sadducees claim to know best they in fact know least.²

Ouch.

Sometimes we need to call out error in a blunt and forceful way. Sometimes people are so committed to their theological convictions that they can't see the truth when it's sitting right in front of their faces. In such cases, I pray that we will be loving and bold enough to bring a rebuke.

Finally, we see in our text:

3. An Answer: He is not the God of the dead, but of the living

Let's observe here that Jesus follows his negative rebuke with a positive answer. Sometimes we might be tempted to respond to our opponents: "You don't know anything about the bible and you don't know anything about God!" followed by a mic drop and an intimidating glare, but that's not what Jesus models here. He says that first part, but then he makes his case for the truth and he does so in a way that the Sadducees can understand.

Their argument was that the Pentateuch made no mention of resurrection, so Jesus decided to meet them on their own playing field. He cites the book of Exodus – the second book of the Pentateuch – to make his case:

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." (Exodus 3:6a ESV)

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 367.

The Sadducees had never heard a defence of the resurrection rooted in this text before. Once again, Jesus is putting his divine authority and wisdom on full display. He does not cite the famous rabbis and their interpretations of the text. Instead, he opens up the text and he helps people to see what they were meant to see all along. He speaks with the authority of God because that's who he is!

He makes a profound argument that seems to follow this line of reasoning:

- i) God made an eternal covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
- ii) Thus, God will keep all of the promises that He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
- iii) Thus, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must still have a future because God has not yet kept all of the promises that He made to them

If God is a promise keeper – and the Sadducees believe that He is – then there **MUST** be a resurrection because these fathers of the faith have not yet received the fulfilment of the promises of God in full! In Hebrews 11 it is said of 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 in faith. Did he somehow lose out on the promises of God because of his death? **NO!** God's promises are not thwarted by death. If He made a promise to Abraham then He will keep it **THEREFORE** the dead **MUST** be raised. The Sadducees were unable to see this, Jesus said, because:

you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (Mark 12:24b ESV)

Now, having taken the time to understand the text, I want to make sure we think through some application. It's not enough to know what God's word says... We need to be transformed by it. Amen? Amen. So, with the time we have remaining, let's wrestle through the application of this passage.

I see three obvious, practical implications in today's text. The first is this:

1. Do not be deceived by false teachers and their arguments

Friends, don't forget that there are false teachers prowling around that would love to lead you astray. Jesus warns us:

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

There will never be a shortage of men and women who are willing to distort the gospel for their own gain. They will pride themselves in preaching sermons that itching ears want to hear. They will throw away every doctrine that gets in the way of receiving the praise and adoration of men. They will use ridiculous, arrogant arguments like the one that we saw in today's text to try and convince you not to trust the Scriptures.

Do not be deceived by such teachers. The only way that you will be able to resist false teaching is if you:

2. Commit yourself to the study of the whole word of God

This was the problem with the Sadducees. They refused to surrender to the whole counsel of God's word and instead decided that they would only trust in the Pentateuch. They were like a first century version of today's red-letter Christians. The red-letter Christian says: "Sure the rest of the Bible is *helpful* but, at the end of the day, if Jesus didn't say it then I don't need to obey it."

Brothers and sisters, if you are not committed to studying all of God's word then you are setting yourself up to be led astray. There are a slew of heretics in the world with churches that are chalked full of people. Sometimes I wonder: "How does that happen? How do people sit through such blatantly, obviously false preaching?" But then I remember, there are a lot of people who are not reading their bible. How are you supposed to spot a counterfeit if you haven't spent any

time looking at the real thing?

Commit yourself to the daily practice of studying God's word. Very practically, I want to encourage you once again to join us in the RMM reading plan. You can read through the whole Bible in a year or you can spread it out over two years if you'd like to go a little slower. Pastor Paul records a podcast that helps to explain the texts that you're reading chapter by chapter. The staff prepares a weekly reflection to help explain each of the chapters you've read. D.A. Carson has a daily devotional that I use every day that helps you to dig deeper into the text. In short, we have SO MANY resources to help you get started in this discipline. There's simply no excuse. Commit yourself today to the study of the whole word of God.

And finally, the last implication I see in our text is this:

3. Remember that God keeps His promises

That's Jesus' point to the Sadducees. There MUST be a final resurrection because God made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and He will see those promises through. It's so important that we remember this because there will be times when it APPEARS that those promises have been forgotten. A good friend of mine put it so well:

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 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.³

Do you have a faith like that? Are you able to believe even in the midst of the storm? Do you know that God's plan for you is good even as your marriage falters, your health fails and your finances crumble? Do you want to know how to develop a faith like that? Open up your Bible and place your trust in the word of God. The prophet Isaiah writes:

³ Paul Carter, Sermon Preached at FBC Orillia on April 9th, 2018.

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. (Isaiah 26:19 ESV)

Death will not have the final word! That's what we celebrated last Sunday – the resounding AMEN of the resurrection. God is not the God of the dead but of the living! Your deceased loved ones who placed their trust in Jesus will receive every blessing that God promised to them. As our bodies ache, and we're reminded of the brevity of life, let us remember that our hope goes beyond this life. It stretches beyond the grave. Our hope is eternal, it is founded on God's promises and He will keep His word – in this life and in the life to come.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.