

Scripture: Mark 12:18-27

Is This Earthly Life All There Is?

Beloved in Christ, this past week the news came out that a vaccine for the virus may soon be available. This was painted in the news as a day of salvation to look forward to. In the meantime, the nation is cautioned to be patient and persevere with the imposed restrictions.

Even the face covering or mask is seen as a kind of sacrament – a visible sign for everyone to see. One local mayor spoke of the mask as a sign, a reminder of the abnormal times we live in as we await the promise of a vaccine.

The point is not to question the benefits of the mask or the vaccine. The world's underlying assumption is that this earthly life is all there is.

In many ways, this is similar to the view of the Sadducees in Jesus' day. They were a religious party among the Jews at the time of Christ. They were also part of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council among the Jews. They accepted only the Pentateuch, the first five books of Bible. However, they said there is no resurrection of the body, no angels or demons (Acts 23:8). They did not believe in a life hereafter; nor the soul living on after we die. They thought you die like an animal.

They now come to Jesus to test Him. They mock Jesus about the resurrection using the example of marriage to trap Him. If this life is all there is, and no resurrection, we are to be pitied! But there is hope. Jesus shows that this life is not all there is. From Mark 12:18-27, we see

1. Their sinister question (vv.18-23)
2. Jesus' pointed and triumphant answer (vv.24-27)

1. Their sinister question (vv.18-23)

Like the Pharisees and Herodians just before, the Sadducees wanted to trap our Lord with hard questions. Like them, the Sadducees also agreed that Jesus must be destroyed.

They now set their trap. They present to Jesus a situation, a very unlikely situation, trying to make the teaching of the resurrection, the after life, look silly (crazy). They want to make this teaching look absurd and make people think that it's only superstition. Like many today, they see Christ's teaching regarding the glory awaiting Himself and His followers on the other side of death as foolishness. In order to discredit (shame) the idea of the resurrection they mock it.

See **verses 18-19**, *"Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him, and they asked Him, saying, 'Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.'"*

They appeal to Moses, to the first five books – specifically to Deuteronomy 25:5-6. This law of Moses concerned levirate marriage. "Levir" means 'a husband's brother.' This ancient practice basically provided a way for the name to continue. The brother of the dead husband takes his place, marrying his widow, so that their firstborn son can carry on the name of the woman's first husband.

But now in **verses 20-23**, using the command of Moses, the Sadducees exaggerate the point almost beyond belief. They fabricate a story just to make the teaching of the resurrection look crazy! *"Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring. And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise. So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also..."*

Using this story as a spring board, they now ask, *"therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife."* As is clear in verse 18, they don't believe in the resurrection. Okay, they say, assuming there is, notice their assumption that follows. They assume that the married life also continues in the life here after. So when the dead arise, the woman will have seven husbands. But she is only allowed to have one! If so, whose wife will she be?

Two husbands would have been enough to prove their point but seven husbands make the story more interesting and it makes believing in the resurrection seem even more absurd and ludicrous. This is what the world today – try to make the Christian faith look ludicrous.

On Wednesday evenings, on zoom, we have been reflecting on the armor of God. Well, this is one of the wiles, the fiery darts, of the devil. It can leave us confused. It can make us doubt the Word of God thinking, "Yes, the Sadducees do have a point. They do raise a good question. I'm not sure how to answer that."

So, yes, we need to go to the Scripture, take up the shield of faith *"with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one"* (Ephesians 6:16). For that, we turn now to Jesus' answer. And may His answer be our shield of faith! This brings us to verses 24-27

2. Jesus' pointed and triumphant response (vv.24-27)

Jesus answers, *"Are you not therefore mistaken..."* (v.24)? In other words, are you not misled, in error? Sometimes people ask the wrong question. The question itself assumes something that is not true. Here the Sadducees assume there is marriage in the life hereafter if there is a resurrection. Is there? Those assumptions need to be questioned.

That's what Jesus does here. His first question here is, *"Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scripture nor the power of God?"* He rebukes the Sadducees for two things. The first is their failure to understand the Word of God. The second is their failure to know the power of God to raise the dead to life. This Jesus will prove from the very books of Moses that they lean on!

Jesus now shows the absurdity of their question regarding whose wife she will be in **verse 25**, *"For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven."* Jesus first affirms that persons will be raised physically from the dead. Believers in Jesus will be brought into the newness of life. Life in the resurrection will be new. But life in the resurrected state will not be 'just this world all over again.' What makes it new?

Men will not marry, nor will women be given by their fathers in marriage. God's people will live forever and their bodies will never die, so marriage and bearing children will no longer be necessary. In this way, we will be like the angels in heaven who neither marry nor are given in marriage. Jesus is not saying that we will be like angels who have no bodies. That's not the point here. We will have physical glorified bodies. We will be distinguished from one another as male from female.

How will our experience in the life of the resurrection compare to our present experience? There will be a deepening of relationships. Our present marriages will not continue in the new creation. There will be a deepening of relationships with one another among all the redeemed. There will be no hindrances, no jealousies and favorites. The woman who in this life had been married to seven husbands, will be free to love all seven without the slightest trace of favoritism. For the same reason, there will be no jealousy on the part of the seven husbands – only room for returning her love in full as they will do for everyone else. In that day the question, “whose wife will she be?” (v.23) will have become irrelevant.

Jesus will be the focus. For all who have confessed Jesus, all the pain and brokenness in marriage relationships in this life will be wiped away. We will be adorned as one bride to Christ, our Bridegroom! In Revelation, the angel talks with John saying, “*Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife*” (Revelation 21:9).

Jesus not only shows how they err in their question about whose wife she will be. Jesus also proves the resurrection from the Scripture, the first five books from the Bible. He asks His second question is in **verse 26**, “*But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’*” He answers, “*He is not the God of the dead; but the God of the living*” (v.27a)

Jesus goes to the book of Moses (their esteemed Scripture!) to show how they do not know the Scripture or the power of God. He refers to the time of the burning bush when God revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 3. Jesus now repeats those same words recorded in Exodus 3:6. Moses lived hundreds of years after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob died; yet what does God say? “I am (not, I was) *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*” He still is their God. They are still living. God is not the God of the dead; but the God of the living! This is because He is the living God Himself. They are awaiting the glorious resurrection of the body when Jesus returns!

God’s covenant promises, His relationship with His people in Jesus, His love for them, do not end when they die. He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. God is faithful to His Word! Three times “God” is mentioned, emphasizing God’s personal relationship with each one!

The Sadducees refused to accept God’s revelation in the rest of the Old Testament and they would refuse to accept God’s final revelation in Jesus Christ. Here, Jesus stands before them, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. They don’t know Him, the Word incarnate, the Word made flesh. They don’t know His power. He has the power to conquer sin, death and hell. The empty tomb will prove this. He does not simply announce the resurrection. He is the resurrection and the life! He is the answer – He who stands before them and us! He is our life!

Note Jesus’ concluding words to them in **verse 27**, “*You are therefore greatly (badly) mistaken.*” In other words, you are way off base! You don’t know the Scripture nor the power of God. This is because they fail to see Him, the resurrection and the life!

The world today has no proof that there is no resurrection. The living Lord Jesus is the proof. He arose from the dead on the third day. The real question is what mankind does with this evidence? Come to Him and believe, and you will know the Scripture and the power of God. Believe in Him and you will live! Deny Him. and there is no life.

All who trust in Christ live with hope and joy because of the resurrection. We will live forever in our resurrected bodies. No, this life is not all that there is. If for you, this life is all there is, you are badly mistaken. You are to be pitied!

For all who trust in Christ, there is the promise of glory, a new creation, life forever and ever with Christ. Geerhardus Vos says it this way, "Believer, this is your hope: 'When Christ rose . . . He left behind in the depths of the grave every one of our sins; there they remain buried from the sight of God so completely that even in the day of judgment they will not be able to rise up against us anymore.'"

There is good reason why we worship on the day of Jesus' resurrection: Sunday. And we have His sacrament, the water in baptism, the bread and wine at His table, as visible reminders and proof of His promises to you. "He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

"Hail, Abraham's God and mine! *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away..."* (1 Peter 1:3-4). Amen.