



Mark 12:24–27

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the God of Jacob’? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”

Reflection

Today’s passage comes from Mark 12:24–27,

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The Son of God is standing in the Court of the Gentiles, the outer court of the temple in the holy city of Jerusalem. He's preaching God's word to God's people in the lead-up to the Passover Festival, a festival that celebrates God's deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. The deliverance he will bring is far greater than anything any of them can imagine despite the full weight of prophetic Scripture pointing to this very moment. And those who knew the Scriptures best, those who had appointed themselves leaders over God's precious flock, the shepherds of God's people in Jerusalem who should have been welcoming their

Messiah with open arms have put aside their bitter infighting so that they can act as one in putting the son of God to death. Jesus is threatening their authority and their livelihoods; prophecy and Scripture might be one thing but their pride and their hip pockets are proving to be quite another. And so, one after another they are coming at Jesus, the whole religious establishment, trying to turn the tide of popular opinion away from him so that they can arrange his death without losing their control over the people. It's ugly stuff.

First it was the chief priest and the elders and the teachers of the law. Next the Pharisees and the Herodians. Today it's the Sadducees. They don't believe in the resurrection because selectively, they only take the first five books of the Bible

as God's word. Now when you don't believe in life after death you tend to become very concerned about the here and now and you begin to build all sorts of castles in the sand. In the case of the Sadducees they'd become proud materialists and political powerbrokers who'd taken control of both the Sanhedrin and the temple which included those profitable markets that Jesus had disrupted yesterday. This type of behaviour must be stopped at all costs.

And so they're trying to publicly discredit Jesus, hoping to trap him in his theology, and cause him to lose face in front of the crowds. To do so they've concocted a ridiculous scenario based on a couple of verses in Deuteronomy 25 and come to Jesus with a question about a woman mar-

ried seven times. The verses in Deuteronomy 25 were written to protect women in a culture in which becoming a widow would often mean destitution. So, in the event of his brother's death, if the younger brother was willing, he was encouraged to marry his brother's widow, for her sake and for the sake of her children. 'What if there were seven brothers, and this happened seven times over, and then this poor woman finally dies herself?' they ask.

Smug and self-satisfied, in the words of the last verse of yesterday's passage, we have their exact words,

23 At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

Jesus's reply is short and devastating. Imagine taking the son of God, the Word become flesh, to task over his theology!

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'You're wrong,' says Jesus, 'wrong be-

cause you pick and choose which part of the Bible to believe as God's word and discount the rest. And wrong because you don't know the power of God.' We'll look at both of these in turn but firstly, despite their wicked intentions and the ridiculous scenario that they've painted here, right down throughout the ages Christians have look very intently at Jesus' reply.

What does happen to the relationship between a husband and wife when they die? What about divorce and heaven? I know some people who have expressed to me the deepest sadness at the prospect of their marriage not lasting in heaven. Others no doubt may feel quietly uneasy about the prospect of encountering their Christian ex-partner in heaven, a person who hurt them deeply during their divorce.

How should we understand Jesus' words when he says that,

25 When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.

I'm not sure. But I don't think this means husbands and wives will be separated in heaven. On the contrary, I think it's likely that the love they hold for each other will be infinitely deepened, but also infinitely widened to include every believer in heaven. Much like the love of our Father.

But back to the Sadducees who are in error because they don't know the Scriptures, picking and choosing what parts to believe. Jesus indulges them by choosing a verse from Exodus, a book they do hold

as the word of God.

have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’?

Hundreds of years after the death of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob God names himself as their God. One commentator concludes from this that by merely pointing to the tense of a single Hebrew verb Jesus disproves one of the key foundations of the Sadducees theology. But he isn't quite right. Jesus' point is that the promises that God makes to his people are far more powerful than death. Paul says in Romans that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, and certainly not something as trivial as death (Rom 8:31–39). God's cov-

enant love is eternal. The promises God makes to his people last forever. That's the power of God.

But the Sadducees don't know the power of God because they're too caught up in their own power; power that Jesus is threatening right now. The crowds might be astonished by Jesus' teaching but their hearts remain hard. But you know such is the power of Jesus' words and the authority of his presence that Luke in his gospel records a response from some of the teachers of the law who are watching on. They're out to kill Jesus too, and Jesus has spoken just as dimly of them, but despite themselves, at this point some of them break ranks and respond,

“Well said, teacher!” (Luke 20:39)

Think & Pray

Take some time today to think back over this passage for yourself. The Sadducees were in error because they didn't know their Bibles, and because they were picking and choosing which parts of the Bible that they would follow and believe. They also discounted the power of God. There's much food for thought here. I don't know about you but I'm a lot like the Sadducees, very caught up in the here and now, trusting in my power over God's power, often getting distracted by material things.

There are some parts of the Bible I prefer over others and plenty of parts of the Bible that I'd prefer to not think about at all. How about you? The wonderful thing

is that even if you are just like me we've been forgiven by God for our wayward lives simply because we've put our faith in his son. But the challenge for us still remains. Are we living in error because we don't know the Scriptures and trust in the power of God? What mistakes are you making but are ignorant of because you don't know the Scriptures? What mistake might you be about to make or to counsel someone else to make because you have not brought to bear the whole counsel of God on this decision? How might God's word make you a better friend, a better mother, a happier person if you just gave it the chance? Think about some of these questions now and then spend some time praying over the answers and committing them to God.