

“The Resurrection of Life”
The Gospel According to Mark 12:18-27
October 7th, 2018

He had rations to last one week. But somehow an Indonesian teenager who drifted out to sea in a floating wooden shack managed to survive 49 days before he was rescued. Every time he saw a large ship, he was hopeful, but more than 10 ships had sailed past him, none of them stopped or saw Aldi.

The floating shack – called a *rompong* – is usually situated 80 miles off the Indonesian coast, totally alone, and floating in the middle of nowhere. Aldi spent his days and nights on the remote *rompong*, lighting lamps at nightfall to lure fish into a trap.

For 6 months at a time, Aldi lived in isolation, with only a walkie-talkie and fleeting weekly supply drops for human contact – when someone came to collect the fish haul and top off the teen's food, cooking gas, drinking water, and generator fuel. That was on a good week.

On a bad week – like when the *rompong's* mooring rope broke – no visit ever came, with strong winds blowing Aldi's fish-trapping shack home out into the distant blue horizon. "I had to soak my clothes in the sea, then I squeezed and drank the water."

Initially, Aldi busied himself by fishing, scanning the horizon for boats, singing gospel songs, and praying. Initially he boiled or grilled his catch, and when the gas ran out he started to burn bits of wood from the hut so he could cook. In the end Aldi just ate the fish raw.

As he floated thousands of miles away from home across the Pacific Ocean, Aldi drew up a calendar in his notebook, marking off the days so he didn't lose track of time. As the days of endless horizon dragged on, he grew increasingly desperate. "There were times when I was crying and thinking about killing myself," he said. "When I was crying the only consolation I had was reading the Bible." He worked his way through the books of Matthew, John, Isaiah, Genesis, and the Psalms.

And, that was the key to Aldi's survival. He had hope because He had the sacred Scriptures which pointed him to Jesus Christ, our Blessed Hope. What an incredible story!

During His last week of earthly ministry, Jesus faced wave after wave of opposition, critique, and hostile examination. This we've seen in our study of the 12th chapter of the gospel account by Mark these past few weeks. The closing verses of **Mark Chapter 11** revealed Jesus' accusers were the Jewish chief priests, scribes, and elders. They were the ones Jesus addressed in **Mark 12:1-12**. Last Sunday, we learned the next wave of critics were the Pharisees and the Herodians. With today's text, we have yet another group – the Sadducees. Though they had differences with each other, they united in their seething hatred of Jesus.

The Gospel According to Mark 12:18-27:

"Then *some* Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him; and they asked Him, saying: ¹⁹"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. ²⁰Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring. ²¹And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise. ²²So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also. ²³Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife."

²⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, “Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know 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 But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the *burning bush passage*, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I *am* the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? ²⁷ He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken.”

I’ve divided this text into three parts:

- MP 1 – Jesus’ accusers;**
- MP 2 – Their accusation;**
- MP 3 – Jesus’ rebuke**

We continue by first considering Jesus’ accusers. *Who were the Sadducees?* This is the only time we find them in Mark’s gospel account. Of the other three writers of the gospel, Matthew mentions them 7 times, Luke once, and John not at all. At the time of the events of this passage of Scripture, the Sadducees were a powerful sect, exercising control of the Jewish priesthood. They did not play well with others, especially the Pharisees.

The Sadducees had no use for the historical writings of the Old Testament, her wisdom books, and the prophets. They regarded only the first 5 books of the Old Testament as having legitimate authority (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy); Jews referred to those books collectively as the Torah (law of God). In Greek these books are known as the ‘Pentateuch,’ meaning “five books.”). The Sadducees could find no reference to angels or the resurrection in the Torah, so they rejected both doctrines. Their view of death was extinction; death has the final word. There is no life in the hereafter. Such a hopeless theology – you’re born, you eat, sleep, grow, and die. (And that’s just sad, you see).

Jesus’ accusers had an accusation. They were looking to shoot holes in the truth Jesus was teaching everyone about the life hereafter. The Sadducees’ tale attempts to tie Jesus up in knots. Consider again what we see in verses 19-23:

“Teacher, Moses wrote that if a man dies and leaves a wife but no child, his brother is obligated to marry the widow and have children. Well, there once were seven brothers. The first took a wife. He died childless. The second married her. He died, and still no child. The same with the third. All seven took their turn, but no child. Finally the wife died. When they are raised at the resurrection, whose wife is she? All seven were her husband.”

The Sadducees referred to what is known as Levirate marriage. The teaching is found in **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**. Levirate marriage is a type of marriage in which the Jewish brother of a deceased Jewish man is obliged to marry the deceased brother's Jewish widow. The first male child coming from that union was typically named after the deceased brother. It was a way of ensuring that God’s Old Testament people didn’t die out.

The Sadducees created a wildly unlikely probability with their story of a woman having 7 different husbands and no children. Unlikely, yes, but still a possibility.

With verse 24, we see Jesus' rebuke of the Sadducees. Par for the course, Jesus answers a question with a question – “Are you not therefore mistaken (deceived), because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?” *Whoa, them's fightin' words!* These Sadducees were the so-called religious experts who likely had the Torah memorized; if that were the case, they should be able to answer their own question. But, Jesus saw through their ploy.

He continues in verse 25, “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” Jesus was telling the Sadducees they misunderstood the doctrine of the resurrection (in fact, they didn't believe it, so they had no business trying to teach Him something about it! In **John Chapter 11**, Jesus refers to Himself as the “Resurrection!”) Let's look more closely at Jesus' words there in verse 25, beginning with a brief refresher using the *Catechism for Young Children*:

Q. 140 - *What becomes of men at death?* “The body returns to dust, and the soul goes into the world of spirits.” *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, which summarizes the teaching of the major Biblical doctrines, says this of our souls in Chapter 32, *Of the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead*, paragraph one, “...(they) neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.”

As for those who do not die in Christ, “the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day.”

Q 141 – *Will the bodies of the dead be raised to life again?* “Yes; ‘The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised.’” (**I Corinthians 15:22**) After death, our souls go to their eternal home, our bodies remain here on earth. When Christ Jesus returns to earth in power and glory at the last day, the bodies of all men, righteous and unrighteous, will be raised from the realm of the dead. Then the Great Judgment takes place; the Apostle John in his gospel account refers to this with two possible outcomes. **John 5:28b-29** – “...All who are in the graves will hear (the voice of the Son of God) and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

At that last day, all the dead shall be raised up, with the same bodies (although with different qualities) which shall be united again to their souls forever.

Q 142 – *What will become of the wicked in the Day of Judgment?* They shall be cast into hell.

Q 144 – *What will become of the righteous?* They shall be taken to heaven.

Jesus answer to the Sadducees asserts that there is a resurrection of the dead yet coming. And, in heaven, there will no longer be need for marriage between a man and a woman. Consider God's purposes for marriage. For one, God created marriage for the mutual help of man and woman. In the Garden of Eden, God observed Adam trying to complete his work alone. God said that was not good, so he created Eve as Adam's helper (**Genesis 2:18**). The marital relationship is the most intimate relationship for humankind this side of glory. But, in glory, we

shall see God as He is, and will enjoy perfect fellowship with Him. There, we rest from our earthly labors.

Another reason God created marriage was procreation - childbirth. Because men and women die physically since the fall in the Garden of Eden, perpetuation of the Seed of the woman first proclaimed by God in **Genesis 3:15**, was another primary reason God created marriage. This is **Malachi 2:15**, "Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring." (NIV)

Thirdly, God created marriage to prevent sexual impurity. This is **1 Corinthians 7:2 & 9**, "...because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*."

Jesus' answer in verse 25 says that in glory none of these purposes is no longer necessary. In that way, we are like the angels (who did not marry). Notice, carefully, dear ones...Jesus didn't say we become angels! Angels are created beings, and so are humans. People do not become angels when they die. We become like them in the sense that marriage is no longer necessary.

Sinclair Ferguson summarizes this well when he writes, "The Sadducees had so small a view of God that they seemed to think the world to come would be simply a continuation of the world as it is. If they had known the power of God to transform human life, they would have already known what Jesus was about to tell them." (Ferguson, 197)

With verse 26, Jesus zeroes in on the Sadducees' hypocrisy. "But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the *burning bush passage*, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I *am* the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? For support of His answer, God takes the Sadducees to one of the Old Testament books with which they should be familiar. Some of you have been studying about the book in which the burning bush passage is found at the Wednesday night Bible study. It is **Exodus 3:1-6**.

Don't miss that Jesus made reference to Himself (God) in **Exodus Chapter 3** as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the present tense. Yet, they were then dead when God said that. Remember it was God Himself who called Abraham out of a pagan environment to a land God would show him. And, that promise of God's people inhabiting a land carried over to Isaac upon Abraham's death, then Jacob upon Isaac's. God promised the land to each of these men. He didn't say He would give the land to their sons, but to give *THEM* a land. Because they didn't enjoy it while they walked the earth, they must rise again from the dead that they may receive the promise.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that the patriarchs, the fathers of the Christian faith, knew that the covenant promises of God went beyond this life and were eternal. **Hebrews 11:10** says Abraham "waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God." Those mentioned throughout the great 11th chapter of Hebrews, the Hall of Faith, lived by faith when their lives on earth came to an end. They didn't receive the things God had promised they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. They were aliens and strangers on earth, as **Hebrews 11:16** says, "Desiring a better country, that is, a heavenly one."

In closing, a brief note of application for each of us. The Sadducees did not know the Scriptures well enough to answer Jesus. They were considered the Torah's answer men! *How well do you know the Bible?* Probably not nearly as well as you should. *How can you improve?*

1 - Well, if you're not yet a believer in Jesus, you do not have the equipment to understand the Bible. You're bored with the Bible and church. You must believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord, placing all your trust in Him. Surrender to Him today.

2 – If you don't have a Bible that you can understand, see me, or ask an elder. Maybe you don't have a Bible at all! Hard to become familiar with what you don't have!

3 – Study that Bible daily. Start with one proverb or psalm or a chapter. Read it and go over it in your mind. Start attending Bible study and/or a Sunday School class.

A vibrant, growing hunger for God's Word will also give you hope in a world where so little of it seems to be.

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BJ Honeycutt, a character on the TV series "MASH," gave this reason why he didn't give in to despair in the midst of the Korean War, "I live in an insane world where nothing makes sense. Everyone around me lives for the now, because there may not be a tomorrow. But I have to live for tomorrow, because for me there is no now." For BJ, his hope for the future was seeing his family again. That hope was sufficient to define how he would behave in an extremely difficult situation.