

Questioning Jesus

Whose Wife Will She Be? – Michael Down

Mark 12:18-27

18 Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 19 “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. 20 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. 21 The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. 22 In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. 23 At the resurrection[c] whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

24 Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 26 Now about the dead rising—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’[d]? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”

If you could ask Jesus one question, any question, what would it be? We’re continuing our series on Questions Jesus was asked and that’s something to think about as we go through this series, what would I ask? Kajle kicked us off with who is my neighbour? That’s a good one. Wes last week did Don’t you care if we drown? That’s deep. We’ve had two great questions so far, well this morning we have a terrible question. This is just such a boring question to ask God incarnate. You have one chance to ask Jesus anything and you ask some trivial matter about how some detail of the law of Moses will be applied in the resurrection, what a boring question from boring people, and I plan to preach a really, really boring sermon just to give you a clear idea of how boring this question is.

So Jesus’ enquirers here are Sadducees. Not to be confused with Pharisees, Sadducees are sad, you see. And the reason Sadducees are sad is because they don’t believe that the dead will rise or that there will be an afterlife. It says that in verse 18 of our portion. They were boring people who asked Jesus a boring question but Jesus, in His answer, opened up a breath-taking reality. They had a miniscule view of the purpose human beings. They had this miniscule view of the grand narrative of Scripture, and this miniscule view of the power of God.

So the Sadducees ask their question to skewer Jesus about this and Jesus, in verse 24, gives the first bit of His answer. “Are you not in error”? Are they? Let’s have a look. They start in verse 19, quoting a Mosaic law, are they correct? They are. No error there. Verses 20-22 are a hypothetical scenario, can’t be wrong in a hypothetical scenario. Verse 23 is just a question, a question can’t be wrong, can it? Yet Jesus says they are in error.

They are in error not so much because of what they said but because of what their question assumed. They don't believe in the resurrection! They literally believe that this is all there is. They say they know God and they say they know the Scriptures and yet they think that this life is God's great purpose for His glory, this is as profound as it gets. And they think the grand narrative of Scripture is not really leading up to anything but simply recording the lives of some dead heroes. God be praised! He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who are all now dead, good for Him and good for them, I hope they had fun here on earth because that's it, their lot is up. What a boring view of what God has purposed for His people. The Sadducees seemed to have a view of the world that was as though it was the way the world should really be. This is nothing. This whole world is a grave.

We're gonna unpack this morning why the Sadducees were wrong about the power of God in resurrection, what it is, from Jesus' answer, that makes it clear that there is a resurrection. First we're gonna look at the power of God in making a world better than this one. Next we're going to look at the power of God in making something better than us. Then we'll look at the power of God in being the God of something better than us!

The Power of God in making a world better than this

Let's talk about what is broken in the world: what is the most intense bodily pleasure we experience on earth? It is sex. What is the deepest human experience and desire outside of God? It is probably romantic intimacy. Yet these two areas provide what is probably the most painful experiences of this life. It is always the pursuit of these things rather than the reality of them that is strongest. You never quite feel like you have arrived. Sex is something so fervently pursued by us as humans, people throw away their careers, marriages, clean criminal records pursuing sex. Islamic theology is basically suffer holiness in this life to get the reward of hedonism in heaven... and their view of paradise is explicitly sexual, not all Muslims believe in 72 virgins, but they all believe in some!

Romantic love is the same, so much of our art and our stories are about love. So many of us pursue relationships, if not for the sex then for the fulfilment of some ultimate desire within us, the end of our loneliness and our sadness, finally finding that intimacy we've been craving. But yet even in the best of marriages, without God, the reality of sex and romance is that the fervor of our pursuit of them is not matched by the reality. It just doesn't quite scratch the itch.

And according to Jesus in this text, our eternity doesn't even contain marriage. There's no sex in heaven. There's no romance in heaven. These things are present here to give us a sense of something cosmic but our desire to be deeply and unconditionally loved and accepted and cherished are never, even in the very best of marriages, are never fulfilled by a spouse. And our desire to find true pleasure is never ultimately fulfilled by sex.

This means that if you have experienced great pain in your life because of the absence of sex and romance. That actually that is very understandable that you feel that pain, it doesn't mean you are shallow. The Bible affirms that these things are painful because people were made to take pleasure in life. Intense, exciting pleasure. Sex is a taste of that, but its not the real thing. People get into trouble with sex when they try to make it bear a load it was never made to bear. God in His mercy has given us this pleasure for a time, for this life, to sustain us until we experience the pleasure we were really made for which is to live forever with God and know Him.

In the same way, if you have experienced great pain because of the lack of romance in your life (and I'm talking to the married and unmarried), again, the Bible affirms that this makes sense. You were made to love and be loved, you were made for deep, meaningful intimacy. Of course it's painful to be alone. But you're not missing the real thing itself, you're just missing the appetizer. Earthly marriage and romance is a taste of it. It is a taste of how you will relate to all humans, including your current spouse if you have one. But it's not the thing itself. It ultimately it points to how we are supposed to find that fulfillment in God.

Jesus was known for sometimes being a bit sharp with people when they asked him ill-intentioned questions but He really let them have it with this one, He was uncharacteristically scathing. You are *badly* mistaken. The pursuits of this world are not the end of all things. You do not know the scriptures and you definitely do not know the power of God. God has put eternity into the heart of mankind. God has placed a craving for the divine in our fibre. The fact that these insatiable desires exist says something to us about eternity.

To paraphrase CS Lewis, did ever occur to you that if you find that the most intense desires within yourself cannot be satisfied by anything in this world even the very best it has to offer, that, maybe, just maybe, you might have been made for another world? Indeed I do find that the deepest longings within my heart are left wholly unsatisfied by this painful world and that if this is truly the only world there is then we live in a very boring and shallow universe and we serve a very boring and shallow god. It would mean that the grand narrative of Scripture is all pointing towards something very menial. It would mean that the deepest purpose of human beings was something trivial and meaningless.

The Power of God in making something better than us

Humans are of course God's great creation. The crowning glory. But we're not all that great. Now I like to think of myself as pretty much the average person, when statistics talk about the average person I always think of myself. But in actual fact I am not at all the average person, because the average person is dead as a door nail. There was a factoid that circulated a few

years ago that there were more people living today than were dead. But that is not true, the dead far outnumber the living (or should I say dying). Even if you assume that people have only been around for 6,000 years, a conservative estimate of the number of dead people is about 65 Billion. To put that into perspective, if these bodies weren't being cremated, or rotting and being buried, if you took all these bodies and laid them into all the worlds built-on areas (ie, where humans live and usually die) Which is about 3% of the world's land surface, the bodies would be stacked about 14 high. You'd be walking on a bed of bodies 14 high. Imagine walking around Vancouver like that, that would be higher than some buildings. I sense that it is unfortunate for the spreading of the gospel that bodies do rot and perish it would rather change the dynamic of the west coast if all of the fun that people like to do had to take place on top of all these bodies. The YOLO theme of our city would take on a much more somber tone. People might wake up to the fact that something is badly wrong with the world if bodies were stacked 14 high everywhere.

Additionally, as we feed off of meat, we are feeding off of corpses of dead animals. This isn't a case for vegetarianism, it's a case for being a thoughtful carnivore. It is possible to live as a vegetarian because we're clever about knowing how to get other nutrients, but if you get lost in the wild, you can't live off of leaves for very long, your gonna need to kill something, or you will die. Those nutrients become you, you are literally made of death.

So humanity is mainly dead, this is the legacy of Adam's race. Mostly dead people, with a few people who have death coming to them pretty quickly in the grand scheme of things. And this is a point that must be stressed very regularly from the pulpit, we are a dying people. Just like the remainder of Adam's life after the fall was very different than that from before the Fall, our lives now are just long enough to grow up, reproduce, raise the kids and then die. And as a society we have glossed over the awfulness of death so much. A lot of the language around funeral services talks about dignity in dying. We're talking about a process where someone goes from being alive with a will and a purpose with the ability to exercise their decisions and help the world, from that to a rotting piece of meat. And we talk about ageing. It sounds so distinguished. You're not a piece of Cheddar. As you look at all those wrinkles, grey hairs and bald patches, you aren't ageing, you're dying.

The dead and the dying, that's us. But the only reason that we have been able to maintain some living people is because we have been reproducing. Do you ever think about that? If we stopped having babies, the earth would be without humans in 100 years or whatever. We'd all be dead. When Jesus says in verse 25 that we will be like the angels in heaven, what's he saying? That we will not have sexual desires in heaven? Is that what He is saying? I don't think so, actually. We get resurrected. All of us. In the same account in Luke (Ch. 20) it says "35 But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, 36 and they can no longer die; for they are

like the angels.” What has my marriage to do with my death? Why, as a result of not dying, would I not need to be married? It’s because I won’t have to reproduce. You’re like the angels in not dying, therefore, you don’t need to get married to propagate the planet.

On top of all that, ultimately we are sinners. We’re nasty to one another. God is mighty to make a better people than the people we are: hence, the resurrection into sinless, deathless life.

The Power of God in being the God of something better than us.

Anyway, if you take the Sadducees literally, they are imagining God having this awesome encounter with Moses. Do you know who I am? What’s my name? I am the God of... wait where is he, there’s all these bodies stacked 14 high, oh here he is, I am the God of... Abraham! As He picks up his corpse. This my man right here, I’m also the God of Isaac, here he is, that’s my boy. And the God of Jacob, what a legend, flops his body back into the pile. I am the God of all these dead bodies, as far as the eye can see. This is my legacy, this is who I am as creator God. Come and let me lead you. I will be faithful to you as I have been with them, you will follow in their path.

What a psychopath. Who would want to follow that god? It would be like marrying the woman in the Sadducees example whose six previous husbands had all died under mysterious circumstances. Who’s the God I can follow that doesn’t end with me being another body in the pile? What’s the point in all that stuff He promised and led them through if it all ends in death??! God is almighty. He is the Most High God of the universe, do think this, this world, this people, this story is His legacy? What a dull view of God.

This is what Jesus is trying to communicate to the Sadducees. He is not the God of the dead, He is the God of the living. The fact that He is the God of a people who live forevermore says something about the God we worship, it speaks loudly about who He is. It says that He is mighty in salvation. Powerful in resurrection. The Sadducees were in error because they didn’t know the power of God. You don’t know the power of God. He isn’t the God of the corpses. The king of the hill where the hill is a burial mound. They were in error because, again in verse 24, they don’t know the Scriptures. The grand narrative of Scripture is leading up to an ever bigger pile of corpses. God is a God worthy of a greater people than we are. He deserves to be the God of a living people.

Exodus 32:12 “Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.” If God is the God of the dead, it’s not ultimately us that look stupid, it’s Him. That is a humbling thought. Jesus did not effect salvation upon God’s people mainly because of the people, it was mainly because of the God. Jesus went

to the cross because God is a living God and He will have a people who live. And the very firstborn of this new humanity of living people, is Jesus. He is bringing about a humanity that isn't a big pile of corpses stacked 14 high in every inhabited space on the Earth. He is ushering in a humanity that lives.

When people ask me which God I follow (actually nobody's ever asked me that). But if they did, I would not tell them that I worship the God of Abraham or of Isaac or Jacob, I would tell them that I worship the God of Jesus Christ. And here's why. Jesus is the only one of all these 65 billion corpses to be alive. Neither dead nor dying, Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He arose from the dead to be the king of all who awake from the dead into eternal life with him.

Again in the Luke account Jesus adds that "They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection". Right now we are a part of a crappy, dead humanity. One day we will arise to be a part of a living humanity.

CONCLUSION

Do you see these things in the power of God in resurrection as we conclude here? Right now we pursue pleasures that are left wholly unfulfilled. That will not always be so. One day we awake to a paradise that contains the intimacy and the pleasure we have been craving forever, we will meet Yahweh, the living God, and the God of all who live.

Right now we are a people who are dead, one day we will be a people who are alive.

And right now it seems as though we worship a God who is the God of mostly people who have died and are dead. But its not so, we worship the God of the living.