

The God of the Living

Mark 12:18-27

Key Verse: 12:27

“He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”

As we have studied, Jesus was in the last week of his life on earth. Jesus spent that week in prayer and in teaching the word of God in the temple courts. How beautiful Jesus' life was! In today's passage the Sadducees came to Jesus with a cleverly crafted question to invalidate the resurrection. They would undermine a fundamental pillar of the Christian faith. Jesus countered by teaching that God proclaims the resurrection in his word. As a conclusion, Jesus said, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Let's think about what this means to us.

I. Jesus said, “You do not know the Scriptures or power of God” (18-25)

The Sadducees were part of the aristocratic ruling class in Israel, and they controlled the office of the high priest. They claimed to believe the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, as their canon. They denied the resurrection and the existence of angels or spirits (Ac 23:8). They were dogged literalists. They would say that since the word “resurrection” was not in the Pentateuch, there was no such thing. To make the idea of resurrection seem ridiculous, they came to Jesus with a story and a question. Their story was based on Moses' teaching that if a man died, his brother must be responsible to marry his widow and have children by her (Dt 25:5-10). This would perpetuate the deceased brother's line and provide protection for the widow. The point of this law was to bear children--to give life. But the Sadducees used this law to concoct a story about death.

Look at verses 20-23. The story begins well. There was a band of brothers, seven brothers, even two more than the Timlin clan. They grew strong and healthy. In due time, the first brother married a beautiful young woman. He dreamed of having ten children. It looked like the beginning of a family dynasty that would prosper and bless many. Then, just after their honeymoon ski trip to Aspen, he caught a cold, developed pneumonia, and died at age 27. It seemed that the bride changed from her wedding dress directly into funeral clothes. Many comforted her and quickly arranged her marriage to the second brother. But after several months, he was killed instantly in a driving accident. The family members began to think the woman was bad luck. But in due time they helped her marry the third brother. Then he died of a sudden heart attack. Overcoming growing animosity from the family, somehow, the woman married all seven brothers one by one, and watched them die one by one--from cancer, from a stroke, from chronic lower respiratory disease, and the last one, from sheer fear. Finally the woman died from old age. What a

strange experience she had. As she got older and older, she married men who were younger and younger. Her first husband was about her own age, but her seventh husband was 21 years younger, like a son. Then the real interesting part came. The Sadducees asked, "At the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" They imagined the resurrected men, with diseased bodies, fighting over the woman, screaming at each other, "She's mine! She's mine!" And this would go on for eternity. In such a clever way, the Sadducees wanted to make the idea of resurrection seem ridiculous.

Here we must recognize the necessity of believing the resurrection. If we do not believe the resurrection, we have no escape from the thought of death. The power of death makes people so pessimistic that they cannot think a happy thought. Rather they think about death every five minutes. They are filled with the elements of death: fear, sorrow, and despair. They become hedonistic. Their catchphrase is, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor 15:32). They become nihilistic; nothing is meaningful, everything is boring. They are the living dead, or "dead men talking," like the Sadducees.

Jesus did not fall into the Sadducee's trap and try to answer their question. Instead, Jesus pointed out their fundamental problem. "Jesus replied, 'Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?'" (24) According to Jesus' analysis they had two problems.

First, they did not know the Scriptures. Actually, these men were accomplished in their study of the Scriptures, like those with Ph.D. degrees. They had read the Pentateuch hundreds of times and even memorized it. But Jesus rebuked their spiritual ignorance that they did not know the Scriptures. It was because they did not understand the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures, that is, the Bible. They had sought to understand with their reason. But they had not been enlightened by the help of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is not like a textbook that we can understand with mere human intellect. Many scholars analyze the Bible in their own way. They deny its divine authorship and see it from a human point of view. They never discover the spiritual treasure hidden there. Voltaire was a man of the Enlightenment. He foretold that after 100 years the Bible would be nothing more than a museum piece. But after 100 years the house he had lived in became a Bible publishing house, which turned out hundreds of Bibles every day.

The Bible is always the #1 bestseller. It is because the Scriptures are God's words. God's words are living, active and eternal (Heb 4:12). God's words never go out of fashion or become irrelevant. God's words are the words of life to our souls (Jn 6:63). 2 Timothy 3:16a says, "All Scripture is God-breathed..." To understand the Scriptures we need the help of the Holy Spirit. So we must be humble before the word of God. We must pray for God's help, kneeling down. We must empty our own thinking until we can hear what God is saying. Then we can find the priceless treasure, the word of life. John 16:13 says, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into

all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” To obtain true knowledge from the Bible we must study deeply by the help of the Holy Spirit.

Second, they did not know the power of God. Here the power of God means the power to raise the dead. God is the Almighty God who created the heavens and the earth. God is the Almighty God who gives life to the dead. To believe the power of God is to believe what God tells us in his word, though it is beyond our experience or imagination. Look at verse 25. “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” The power of God not only raises the dead, it transforms us. In heaven we will be different than on earth. We will be changed. We will be like the angels: spiritual and immortal. We will not be bound by finite laws and limits of the world. Marriage will not be necessary any longer. In this world, marriage is necessary. Without marriage there would not be any children. God wants us to marry, bear many children and raise them as godly offspring (Mal 2:15). But there is no marriage in heaven. We will be full of joy and peace all the time, without marriage, like the angels. There will be no more mundane struggles with the flesh, we will be spiritual beings. God changes us by his power, the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:42b-44a says, “The body that is sown is perishable; it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” There will be no more colds or flu, no more disease or pain or sorrow. There will be no more potbellies, no more baldness, no more wrinkles. There will be no sin or death or evil. We will be spiritual beings like the holy angels. This does not mean that husbands and wives will not know each other or love each other anymore. Rather, they will love each other even more than they do now. Dr. Joseph Chung will love Missionary Esther even more in heaven, and vice-versa. However, we will be different; we will be spiritual beings, like the angels. In this part we learn that resurrection faith is necessary. When we study the Scriptures very deeply we can believe that God is almighty. When we believe that God is almighty, we can know that surely there is resurrection. In this way, Jesus gave a knockout punch to the Sadducees and won the boxing match.

II. Jesus said, “He is the God of the living” (26-27)

After rebuking the Sadducees, with a shepherd’s heart Jesus tried to help them open their spiritual eyes to the resurrection. Jesus taught them from Exodus, one part of their canon. Jesus said, “Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?’” (26). Although the Sadducees had talked about what Moses said to them, Jesus talked about what God said to Moses. God revealed himself to mankind through his words to Moses.

God's words tell us that he is a God of personality who makes personal relationships with men and identifies himself through those relationships. God's word also tells us that he blesses people through their faith. God identified himself with three distinct persons: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the patriarchs of Israel, who had faith in God. As we study Genesis, we can find that God made a personal relationship with each one of them. God met them where they were and revealed his power through their lives and blessed them. God gave Abraham a son by his power, though his wife was barren. This happened when Abraham was 100 years old and his wife Sarah was 90. Later God told Abraham to offer his son back to God as a burnt offering. To Abraham, this was contradictory because God had promised to fulfill his covenant promises through his son Isaac. But Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead (Heb 11:19). He learned resurrection faith and could obey God even when it was impossible. Isaac was an only son and seemed to be a man of weakness. But he was more patient in prayer than his father Abraham. He was also obedient to God's command to stay in the land, which Abraham had a hard time with. Through Isaac's humble prayer and obedience, God blessed him with victory over the world and he successfully passed God's covenant to the next generation. Jacob was a sneaky person who managed to outwit his older brother and gain his birthright; he also caught God's blessing. Jacob was so clever that he managed to get everything he wanted in the world. But these things did not satisfy him. When he realized this, he found that he needed God. All the while God had been waiting patiently for Jacob. God met him personally and changed him from a deceiver into Israel, a man who struggles with God. Jacob could bless his sons properly and worship God. Each of these men was different. They were men of weaknesses, and they made mistakes. But God knew each one personally and dealt with each one personally. And they lived by faith in God. God credited their faith most highly. To God, other things do not matter, such as money, power, social position, or beauty. To God, faith in God is important. When the patriarchs lived by faith in God, God credited their faith. God gave them his kingdom and eternal life as his blessing. Hebrews 11:16 says that God was not ashamed to be called their God.

To God our personal faith matters. To Jesus our personal faith matters. When we have faith in him he is not ashamed of us but willing to recognize us as his children. In Mark 5, a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years came to Jesus. She had faith that if she just touched his cloak she would be healed. It happened as she believed. But she tried to escape without being noticed by Jesus. Jesus did not let her. Jesus pressed her hard until she came forward and confessed what had happened to her. Then Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mk 5:34). She became a child of God by her personal confession of faith in Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus cannot work with those who have no faith. When Jesus visited his hometown, he wanted to heal their sick and share the life-giving word of God with his neighbors and relatives. But they saw him without faith, from a human point of view. When they had no faith, Jesus could not bless them (Mk 6:5).

Verse 26 tells us much more about God than we can share in this short message. It tells us that God is the God of covenant. God made a covenant with Abraham. It was an everlasting covenant. God remembered that covenant and worked in the lives of Abraham's children and grandchildren and the succeeding generations to keep that covenant. We can also learn that God is the God of history. History has a direction and flow because God is making history.

Jesus concluded in verse 27, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!" God is always the same. God is "I Am who I Am." God does not change and he exists in and of himself. He does not need anything from anyone. He is wholly other and wholly separate in nature from his creation. To this great God there are two kinds of persons: the dead and the living. The dead are those who do not have faith in God based on his words, such as the Sadducees. To them everything is dark and tragic. They can turn the most beautiful sunset into a reason to complain. They can turn the most beautiful Bible story into a nightmare. Though they are blessed with the most beautiful and graceful wife, they are not thankful but bitter.

The living are those who have faith in God. Through their faith, God works in them. God makes them alive. Moses is one example. Before Moses met God personally, he was dead in transgressions and sins. Then God met him through the burning bush and said, "I am the God of your father...." God's words pierced his soul. Moses began to recognize God's presence. Moses began to rely on God's power. Then he was able to do mighty miracles. God used him to liberate his people from bondage and lead them to the promised land.

The question is, are we living or dead? We can be the living when we have faith in God. We may be weak and make many mistakes. But God works through faith to give us life and power. Then we can have hope that endure hardships. We can be thankful and joyful and positive all the time, finding some possibility in any situation. We can be full of spirit and ready to do everything for the glory of God. Now we have many things to do. We must prepare for Christmas Worship Service. We must prepare for Purdue 2008. We must serve all kinds of people and pray for many countries. But these things are not a problem. Whether we are living or dead is the problem. If we are living, we can do all things joyfully for the glory of God.

Some people say there is a culture of death in America today. Those who live without God spread the power of death in many ways. But this is not a problem to us. God is the great God who gives life to the dead. When we believe in God we can experience the power of life in our souls. We can have resurrection faith that we will be changed into spiritual beings. We can do great things for God. Let's study the Bible deeply and personally, put our faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses and live as a blessing to the people of our time. Let's pray that God may change our culture to a culture of life for his glory.