

71 Mark 12:18-27 (Title)

Text

And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question, saying, 19 “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. 20 There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. 21 And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. 22 And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. 23 In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.”

24 Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither 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 And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? 27 He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.”

Introduction

This is the third confrontation passage in this section of Mark. The first came from the chief priests and scribes and elders. Theirs was a direct outright confrontation regarding his authority. The second was from the Pharisees and Herodians and was more subtle in its approach. This third one comes through the Saducees and aims to ridicule his position.

We do not know a lot about the Saducees, but here is what we do know. They rejected the notion of the resurrection. They did not believe in angles. They held that the only scripture was the first five books of the Old Testament. All of these facts about them come into play in this interaction.

Question

19 “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. 20 There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. 21 And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. 22 And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. 23 In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.”

They set-up their challenge by referencing Deut 25:5-6

If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. 6 And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.

The way they have framed this discussion is in typical rabbinic style. This suggests that these particular Sadducees were scholars, the equivalent of Scribes in the camp of the Pharisees. Their challenge actually has three premises - this one, and two of which are unstated. Their second premise is that this current life is more or less the same as the afterlife. Their third premise was that polygamy was wrong, since their question assumed that she would only be married to one of the men in heaven.

There is a story of a woman in the apocryphal book of Tobit, that had 7 husbands. It is possible that they Sadducees were referencing this actual story or that it inspired their question. Either way, they establish their first premise in scripture, and they could have established their third one also - that polygamy is wrong. But it is their second premise (assuming equality between this age and the age to come) that proves to be their undoing.

Answer

24 Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither 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."

Jesus' answer is exceedingly brief and wonderfully profound. Jesus gives a two-fold response to their challenge. He asserts that they do not know scripture or the power of God. In this two-fold reply, he will demonstrate the truth of it by correcting their mistake as well as provide a positive case for the resurrection.

A Refutation

First, a refutation of their presupposition. Jesus references the angels, which seems like an illegitimate move, since the Sadducees do not believe in them. But that is precisely the point. Jesus' first statement is that they do not know the scriptures. This would have been a real slap in the face for someone on the level of a Scribe. These ones especially since the only parts of scripture that they actually held to be scripture was the first five books. These guys are scholars who specialize in just five books. So when Jesus says that they do not know the scriptures, that is a serious challenge.

Jesus' use of the angels serves two purposes. First, it establishes his accusation that they do not know the scriptures.

Genesis 3:24, He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 19:1 The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom.

Genesis 28:12 And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!

Exodus 23:23 “When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, and I blot them out,

The existence of angels is well attested in scripture. How these men could supposedly be scholars and yet not believe in angels was a blatant example of how they do not know scripture. The second thing Jesus use of angels does is challenge the notion that the age to come will be the same as this age. Angels are described as an innumerable host such as what John sees in his vision. They inhabit a different realm but are able to enter our world. I am reminded of when the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened and he saw the entire mountain full of horses and chariots of fire. There are different classes of angels. The Cherubim seem to be guardians. It was a cherubim that God placed at the entrance to Eden, it is Cherubim that stand surrounding the throne of God. It is cherubim that are described as attending God's chariot.

The seraphim are described only once, and they fly around the throne of God sinning holy holy holy is the Lord.

There are archangels such as Michael. Angels have great power, such as the angel of death who killed all the firstborn of Egypt in one night. They can strike people mute. They can strike people blind as with the men outside of Lot's house. They can appear in such magnificent glory that people unaware will begin to worship them.

With such consistent testimony of beings who themselves testify to a whole other realm of existence, it is foolish to believe that life in the age to come is the same as here. In that age there will be no death. On earth death surrounds us constantly, so procreation is necessary just to keep humanity going. It will not be necessary in heaven. It is an entirely different world. The angels and their nature are powerful evidence of this.

Jesus further explains that in the age to come we will neither marry nor be given in marriage. For those of you who have experienced the bliss that marriage can be, this may be a surprising statement. I have a wonderful marriage, and it is inconceivable to me to ponder life with out Michelle. It seems odd that I would not be married to her for eternity. But let us never base our theology on our feelings. Biblically, there will be no marriage in heaven.

This I know, God is good. My conceptions about what would be fun or joyful and what would not have changed considerably over time. Only after God has sovereignly brought something about do I see how wise he was and how my ways are not his ways. I know that God is good, and though there will not be marriage in heaven, I have complete faith that what God has in store for us will far exceed even our expectations.

Positive Evidence

26 And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 27 He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong."

In verse 26, Jesus begins to set forth positive evidence for the resurrection. There are other passages that would be more obvious to use. Here are a few examples;

Psalm 16:9-10 Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. 10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

Daniel 12:2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Job 19:25-26 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,

Hosea 13:14 Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death? O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?

Jesus, however, did not use any of those. Why? If you look carefully, you'll see that none of them come from the first five books of the Old Testament. Jesus desires to answer them on their own terms. So he references **Exodus 3:6** "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." On the surface, the argument seems to focus on the tense of the verb.

When a friend has died and you are speaking to his son, you introduce yourself saying, "I was a friend of your father." Thus the tenses seem to imply the continued existence of these patriarchs. While that is a good translation, technically there are no verbs in Jesus' citation, nor in the original Hebrew. So while it is perhaps implied, I think the main point of the argument falls elsewhere. France comments on Jesus' answer saying:

It is a cryptic, allusive argument worthy of a rabbinic teacher, but its basis, far from being merely the tense of a verb, is the fundamental theological understanding of Yahweh, the living God, and of the implications of his establishing an everlasting covenant with his mortal worshippers.

You see, there is more to this answer than merely a proof-text - there is a story.

In the beginning God. God created the world. He populated the earth with life. He gave breath to every living creature. Last he created mankind and breathed his breath into him. We live because God has given life to us. He holds the power of life in his hands. He placed them in a garden, specially prepared for them. This was God's place, God's people, and God's rule. There was a tree of life, and it promised life eternal.

We all know what happened. God's people rebelled against God's rule and therefore God kicked them out of his place. But when he did this, there was a promise of redemption. Death was the curse of their rebellion. The promise of the seed who would crush the head of the serpent is reflected upon in Hebrews 2:14, "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil."

The people are divided one against another. And from the fall through the flood and through the table of nations we have this refrain, "and he died," "and he died," and he died." Death reigned supreme. But then God speaks, and in chapter 12 of Genesis, God calls Abraham out of Ur to go to a place where he will show him. God's people, God's place, God's rule.

God's promise of a seed had not failed either. He promises Abraham a son. Both Sarah and Abraham are so old, however, that both Paul and the author of Hebrews mention how they were as good as dead. And yet God brought life from what was as good as dead. God then called Abraham to take this promised son and offer him as a sacrifice. Abraham went in obedience believing that God would raise him from the dead. It was this faith that made Abraham the father of the faithful. All of God's promises to Abraham were this, God's people (Abraham's

descendants), God's place (the promised land), and God's rule (the curses and blessings). Those promises start being fulfilled in a partial sense, with the growth of the Jews. God's people were becoming numerous. God's land was next. This is where we find ourselves in Exodus 3. God is on the verge of bringing the people out of Egypt and into the promised land, and along the way establishing them as a nation and entering into covenant with them.

Rick Watson observes:

Jesus' reference to Ex 3:6 uniquely grounds his argument, not only in Torah but also in the one place where God himself uttered this self-designation, and in the context of his powerful exodus redemption of Israel. At issue, then, is not the phrase itself, but rather the nature of God who uttered it. And in the context of Ex 3 this means the character and power of the self-sustaining I AM who is the source of creation's order and life, the pinnacle of which is humanity made in his image. (Watson, Commentary on the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, 216).

This is Yahweh who created the universe and filled earth with life. This is God who promised to crush the one who had the power of death. This is the great I AM who brought forth Isaac from parents as good as dead. This is the powerful God who demonstrated his power to give life at will by turning Moses' staff into a snake. The Sadducees do not know the power of God.

This is the covenant-keeping God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. If he has spoken, it will come to pass. Again, the writer of Hebrews looking back on the patriarchs states:

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God [his covenant rule], for he has prepared for them [his people] a city [his place].

The Sadducees did not know scripture. Christ ends, "He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong." God's nature as a covenant-keeping God required the resurrection, and his power rendered it certain.