

The Resurrected Life
Mark 12: 18-24

1 Peter
Revelations 5
Responsive: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

In our passage that we have this morning as is Mark's custom he does not waste any time in moving the narrative forward and again starts out here saying "Then" And while these accounts that have been recorded here in chapter 12 seem to be happening in quick succession we must remember that it is likely that Jesus was not here in Jerusalem for just a few weeks as it would seem reading through Mark, but rather it was over the course of a few months. It is likely that these accounts did not happen all back to back on the same day, but rather took course over at least a couple of days.

So up to this point we have heard from the Pharisee's, and others from the Sanhedrin who have confronted Jesus in an attempt to discredit him, or better, catch him in some blasphemy to justify their true intent of having him put to death. Our passage that we will be looking at today is another one of those traps, more men, from the sect of Sadducee's this time have come and in their wisdom believed that they have devised an unanswerable question to stump Jesus. So let us read our passage this morning, Starting in verse 13 and reading to verse 24.

So before we can start digging into this passage we need to first understand the Sadducee's and where this logic come from. At first glance it seems quite odd I think, and almost laughable to us to put together this logical string of arguments but if we understand their presuppositions and beliefs it will help us to understand why this question is actually one that they are taking very seriously. As we know, the religious rule in Israel was conducted by the Sanhedrin, which was a group of men, sort of like a council made up of religious leaders of some of these various sects, namely the Pharisee's, and the Sadducee's. Now both of this groups were actually quite different in their beliefs, with the acception with their understanding of their position with God due to their lineage tracing back to Abraham. But as far as putting the teachings of the prophets into practice they were in a stark disagreement with the Pharisee's.

If we were to classify these 2 groups today, the Sadducee's would be highly conservative, their faith was derived from only the Torah, if it did not come from the written word of the Torah, it was discarded. . While the Pharisee's would be considered much more progressive in their belief. Their belief was based around the Torah as well, but they also took into account other writings, the words of the prophets, and oral traditions. So that meant that they differed on quite a few things, the Sadducee's firmly expressed a belief in man's free will alone, while the Pharisee's understood and believed in God's absolute divine sovereignty over mankind. The Sadducee's also denied the existence of Angels, demons, and even an afterlife. Their belief system was a very literal system only believing that which was expressly taught in the Torah, not inferred or hinted at, but only directly mentioned and taught.

And as we see apparent in our passage this morning they do not believe in the resurrection, and why would they if they do not believe that there even is an afterlife. So this line of questioning that they are asking Jesus would seem to be a bit of a mockery. It is also I think important to note that the difference between the Sadducee's and the Pharisee's did not only stop at doctrine, but the differences were even apparent in social and political matters.

The Sadducee's comprised a clerical, and lay aristocracy that was associated with the priesthood. The priesthood was the dominant influence among the Jews therefore the Sadducee's like the priesthood belonged the highest social rank of Jewish society. They were men of wealth, and rank. The Sadducee's association with the priesthood meant that their influence was focused in the temple and all of the temple operations.

The priesthood was not only an important religious influence they were also a very important political influence as well. So with the Sadducee's being closely aligned with the priesthood put them front and center in the political discourse of Israel and Rome to which they were receptive to Hellenism, which is just another way of saying the Roman or Greek way of life, and influence on the society which is apparent by their collaboration with the Roman rule.

This confrontation with the Sadducee's is the only recorded encounter with this group in the Gospel of Mark. Up until this point it has been the Pharisee's, and a mention of some men from the Sanhedrin, but this is the first time that the Sadducee's were specifically named in a confrontation with Jesus. And the point of contention that they bring to him is focused around the resurrection. They themselves believing that when one died, the soul perished along with the body, so they rejected the belief of an afterlife, or any beliefs such as rewards, or even punishments after death. The doctrine of the resurrection is only vaguely foreshadowed in the old testament, but as Vic had said last week, in the account of Abraham offering his son Issac as a sacrifice believed that if God was willing, that he would resurrect him.

Even Abraham believed in the resurrection. And outside of the Sadducee's the belief in a resurrection was the prevailing belief by most Jews in Jesus' day. IT would seem that the the general belief in a resurrection had come from the rabbi's understanding of the old testaments allusions to it, and from such accounts as Enoch, and Elijah who were believed to have not died but rather were raptured into heaven. But the Sadducee's denied these beliefs, and understandings and it would seem that in confronting Jesus their motive was 2 fold. First off, they believed that since they believed the idea of the resurrection was foolishness that it was an easy target to trap Jesus with using logic to show how ridiculous this notion was. Second, this was also an opportunity to prove to the Jewish society at large that this idea of the resurrection was ridiculous.

It would seem that the tactic that they are taking here is the debate tactic of taking your opponents view to the logical outcome of absurdity. And they devise this question, based on the concept of levirate marriage that was set forth in Deuteronomy. Lets look at that passage real quick, chapter 25: verse 5-10. "If bothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, he widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family, her husband's brother shall go into her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be that the first born son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. But if a man does not want ot take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate to the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, but if he stands firm and says, I do not want to take her, then his brothers wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face and answer and say, so shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brothers house. And his name shall be called in Israel, the house of him who had his sandal removed."

This levirate marriage was also mentioned in Genesis, when Onan who, in order to annihilate his brother's family line, refused to have a child by his brother's wife Tamar, which angered God and he was killed. This marriage practice seems very odd to us today, but its purpose at the time was to insure that the Israelite lineage remained pure, it helped to prevent intermarriage with the Gentiles and preserved honor and property within the family's line in the case where a woman's husband had died. It also served as a protection for the woman, in this patriarchal society where women did not have the rights, or opportunities that they have today, this practice also insured that they would be taken care of, that they would have a roof over their head and food to eat.

So as we see this practice was not one devised out of an idea of polygamy, or promiscuity, but rather it was to be a gracious act of provision for the widow, and an honor to the memory of the brother who had died. So the Sadducees take this concept of honor, and grace and devise a logical progression to make the idea of any sort of afterlife absurd. Their questioning is based on the beliefs of the Pharisees and the rabbinic assumption that the world to come, that is the afterlife is essentially just an extension of earthly conditions, including the married state. So the Sadducees pose this question based on the concept of monogamy being the marriage ideal, but in the afterlife she would have had 7 husbands in heaven, and in their minds this made the whole idea of the resurrection ridiculous!

So just like with the Pharisees when they thought they had devised a question that would trap Jesus in his answer, They asked, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. For if he were to say, yes then the Jews will be upset for paying taxes to what they saw as an oppressive foreign occupation would be showing support for that occupation, but if he says no, then he will have to contend with the Roman government as promoting treason. The Sadducees thought that they had Jesus stuck in a similar situation, for if he were to argue for the resurrection and afterlife he would have to argue to try to justify this situation on whose husband this widow would belong to, or he would have to concede to the Sadducees and admit that there is no resurrection adding confirmation to their rejection of such a belief.

But what does Jesus do? He does not answer their question, but instead just like he did when the Pharisees confronted him, turned and pointed to the root of their error, verse 24. "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the scriptures nor the power of God?" Jesus takes an authoritative stance and does not fall into their trap but rather turns it back around on them questioning their knowledge and understanding of scripture. Now, remember what I said about the Sadducees and their rigid, literal understanding of the Torah? The Sadducees were considered to be the authority over the understanding of the Torah and Jesus here calls them out on their misunderstanding. It would be like telling Wall Street that they do not understand the stock market. Scripture, and authority were the 2 matters in which the Sadducees claimed to know best, but Jesus tells them that they are mistaken, and in fact do not know anything at all. Jesus' response strikes right to the root, right to the center of their issues, he does not attack their weak points, but goes directly to their strengths, and proves their weakness in understanding, their lack of authority when confronted by the Messiah, and shows that their belief has not only gone astray, and is wrong at secondary and side issues, but rather it is wrong even to the core and center of their beliefs.

In verse 25 here, Jesus sets the record straight that the resurrected life in the afterlife is not just a mere continuation of the earthly life. It is not just a sanctified extension, but it is a new and glorious life. He says, "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."

It is a transformation from this life, to the next. Life here on earth, and life after the resurrection is categorically different, so much so that in Jesus statement he uses heavenly beings to describe the afterlife in heaven. It was quite the common belief among the Jews that the marriage life characterized the resurrected life, and the bible uses such terms as the church being the Bride of Christ, but that only describes the relationship we have with God, not the resurrected state. As we can see, from this passage there is much more to the life after death for God's children than a simple transition from earth, to heaven. It is a complete transformation, "we shall become like angels in heaven" All of these earthly cares, titles, stations, identities will not matter, all that will matter is our identity in Christ, as we gather around the throne and worship God.

That is why I had us read Revelations 5 this morning. This vision of worship in heaven, singing praises to the father for his grace, mercy, and righteous judgment. Turn with me to Revelations 14 in the first few verses we see exactly this, the transformed life of God's children. "Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads." God's children who have been covered by the redemptive blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, who have been resurrected and transformed from this life, to the next. Verse 2. "And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the 144 thousand who were redeemed from earth." These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb where ever he goes. These were the redeemed from among men, being first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they were without fault before the throne of God."

Now I understand there is much controversy in this passage, the understanding of who is this 144,000, who are these who have not been defiled and follow the Lamb everywhere he goes. There has been much debate, and there is generally 2 ways that you can understand this passage. 1, literal, that these 144000 represent a literal amount of people, but then you must classify who these people are for we know it can not be all of those who are in Christ, for the bible says that Abraham's children will be numbered like the sands of the sea, and the stars in the sky. 2. which is the view I prefer, is that this is a symbolic number, the number 12 is used in scripture to to symbolize completeness, perfection, and God's power. They 12 houses of Israel, the 12 Disciples, the 144000, is 12 multiplied by itself, and then again by 1000 indicating completeness and perfection to the absolute ultimate degree. These are all of those who are the children of Christ, and it is complete, there are no more, or no less but it is the exact innumerable amount who have been sovereignly elected by God to be redeemed by his Son.

There is a few key phrases here that point to this understanding of the 144000, verse 4 "these were the redeemed from among men, being first fruits to God and to the Lamb." 1 corinthians 15:20-26 puts these events in order. "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, those who have died. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in their own order, Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom of God to the father, when he puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."

Since these who have been made alive and resurrected after Christ, all those are God's children throughout all of time can not be only 144000, so a symbolic understanding of this number to mean the complete, and total amount makes the most sense. The next important thing to note here, is the description of these 144000, verse 4. "These are the ones who were not defiled by woman, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the lamb wherever he goes, These were the redeemed from among men, being first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God."

Who could these 144000 perfect people be? Well, I believe it is us, everyone redeemed by the blood of the lamb. But you may read this and say this can not be you, but I say that if you are in Christ it is in deed you, for your sins, your lusts, your lies and deceit, has been washed away by the blood of the lamb and through Christ we can stand at the throne of God forgiven, without fault or shame. As pure as virgins, who's mouth has no deceit and who are without fault because of Christ's atoning work on the cross. Beautiful isn't it? The hope that we have to stand before God faultless, blameless, a new transformed creature, singing a new song.

but that is not what I wanted to focus on this morning, but it is rather this scene of these 144,000 redeemed who have the name of Jesus written on their forehead, worshiping, singing a new song, praising God. This imagery fits with Jesus statement in our passage today, it is a glimpse into heaven and the glories that await us after the resurrection. When we are talking about such things we can not fully understand, but can only see a glimpse a small portion of the glory of God, of his power and authority. God's power to create and restore life is beyond our limits of imagination and understanding. While we can see this little images, these glimpses into the life to come it pales in comparison to the glorious reality. One author likened this life transformation to the next is like that of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, but it is even greater. To quote James Edwards, "Our present earthly experience is entirely insufficient to forecast divine heavenly realities; we can no more imagine heavenly existence than and infant in utero can imagine a Beethoven piano concerto, or the Grand Canyon and Sunset.

So in our passage this morning, Jesus does not liken the resurrected life as anything here on earth, but as angels in heaven. It makes this question of the Saducees completely unimportant and ridiculous. Whose wife will she be after having married 7 brothers, the answer...none of them, for heaven is more then marriage, and the resurrection more then a sanctified version of this life. And as if this is not enough, Jesus goes on in verse 26, using the old Testament, the scripture that these Saducees were seen to be an authority of, to declare the resurrection to them. "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? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living You are therefore greatly mistaken."

The argument that Jesus makes here is done in the classic rhetorical rabbinic style of debate, Showing that the resurrection is taught, or at least assumed in the Torah, Jesus quotes Exodus 3, verse 6. which as I said was within the realm of scripture that was accepted by the Saducees, and that they claimed to have complete understanding and authority of. Jesus point of drawing them to the account of the burning bush was the show that the patriarchs and prophets were still alive. His argument here is that the promises of God are not made to the dead, but to the living. If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are dead as the Saducee's believed then God's promises them would be limited to the duration of their earthly lives which makes God's promises finite, and unfulfilled.

God would not, indeed could not make promises that would go unfulfilled, that would make God a liar, he would not pledge himself to those who are dead, unless of course those dead were raised to life. Jesus argument here for the reality of the resurrection is based on the assumption that the call of God establishes an eternal relationship with God and once that relationship is established it is granted the promises of God and it can not be ended even by death. Our relationship with God is the result of the promises and power of God that conquers the last enemy, death itself.

Jesus concludes here in verse 27, not only affirming the resurrection but also with a condemnation of the Sadducee's position, he tells them "You are badly mistaken" What the Sadducee's are believing is contrary and incompatible with the truth of God. The ultimate answer to their argument is not one of exegesis, or even the authority of Jesus himself, neither of which they would accept, but rather it is the life of Jesus himself, for the empty tomb will verify and prove his teaching here. Jesus does not simply announce, and teach the resurrection, but he himself is the resurrection The first fruits of many, who afterward will join him around the throne of the father singing a new song of praise. What hope, what glory, what grace and mercy God has toward his children that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we may be found faultless, and blameless before the throne of God.