

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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Q & A with Jesus (Part 2)
Mark 12:18-27

This morning, we are continuing our study of the Gospel according to Mark. We are in the final week of Christ's earthly ministry. It's Tuesday or Wednesday. Friday Jesus will be crucified by the religious leaders under the authority of the Romans. And Mark chapter 12 records the escalating conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of Israel, particularly a group known as the Sanhedrin, or the High Court of the nation of Israel.

The Sanhedrin had already made up its mind to destroy Jesus. But they feared the crowds who believed Jesus was sent by God. So, they decided to try and publicly discredit Jesus by asking Him a series of trick questions they thought would make Him look foolish in front of the crowds.

Last week, we saw representatives from two groups (Pharisees and Herodians) confront Jesus about taxes. Not only did their question fail to make Jesus look foolish, but Christ's response also caused the people to marvel at Him.

So, the Sanhedrin sends another group to ask Jesus another trick question. And that's where we'll pick up for this morning.

Mark 12:18–23

18 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."

The Sadducees were largely upper-class Jewish men who occupied a significant number of positions of power in Jewish culture. They only accepted the first 5 books of the Old Testament as authoritative and treated the rest of the Old Testament like commentary or cultural history. They didn't believe in the spiritual realm, which meant they didn't believe angels or demons existed. And they didn't believe in an afterlife or that there would be a resurrection of the dead at the end of the world. They believed once you died, that was it.

And that's why they were so determined to be rich and powerful. Since there wasn't anything to live for beyond this life, they figured you had better get as much pleasure and power as you can while you live. They hated Jesus because Jesus threatened everything their power structure was predicated upon. He had power over demons and even raised people from the dead. He claimed to be the resurrection and the source of eternal life. So, they come to Jesus with this made-up scenario that they think will stump Jesus.

They give context for their question by referring to a provision in the Law of Moses from Deuteronomy 25 that enabled people to keep their wealth and inheritance in the family when a man died without children. It was called levirate marriage. Levirate marriage allowed for the closest living relative to marry the widow and have children so that they could inherit the family's wealth. The most famous example of this in Israel's history was the story of Boaz and Ruth. He married Ruth and raised children who were able to claim the family inheritance.

In the Sadducees' made-up story, there is a woman who marries one of seven brothers. Her husband dies before they have children, and his brother takes her as his wife. He also dies before they have children, so another brother takes her as his wife. This happens with all seven brothers who all die without having any children. Finally, the woman dies without children.

Then comes the big finish. You can almost hear these men who don't believe in a resurrection snickering like a bunch of junior high boys as they ask their question..."Jesus, when they all get raised from the dead at the end of the world...whose wife is she going to be then?"

They turn and high-five each other. I mean, Jesus couldn't possibly think that heaven would allow a woman to be married to seven men for all eternity, right? These religious Einsteins had painted the man who claimed to be the resurrection and the source of eternal life into a corner. What could He possibly say to these brainiacs?

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."

Jesus is the best. He answers their question by saying, "Let me tell you why you are wrong." The word "wrong" in verse 25 translates a word that means "to be led astray; to wander around aimlessly." He is saying they are so far off the path of truth that they are just wandering aimlessly through life.

And why are they aimlessly wandering off the path of truth? He says it's because they don't understand two critical things: the word of God and the power of God. We'll come back to that in a minute.

Then, He tells them the truth. In the world to come, we aren't going to be married like we are in this life. Marriage is just a picture of Christ's relationship with His people. It's a shadow of something that is going to be fulfilled when Jesus receives all of His people as His bride. God will be our true Father. Christ will be our One, Great love. We will be united to Him and united to everyone who is in Him in a way that fulfills and transcends even the most intimate and enduring relationships here on earth.

In that way, we will be like the angels...we won't become angels, but will be like them in that we won't have need for marriage anymore. We won't need shadow relationships in Heaven because we will

have the reality, the eternal relationship we were truly made to have with Jesus Himself. The Sadducees missed out on this truth because they couldn't conceive that God is so powerful that He is able to fulfill and transcend the most powerful and intimate relationships we have in this life. We won't have something less real or less pleasurable than marriage, we will have something more permanent and more satisfying than marriage – namely the fountainhead of all joy and pleasure, God Himself – Father, Son, and Spirit.

Then, Jesus uses one of the most common phrases in the first five books of the Bible to describe God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That phrase uses the present tense verbs to describe God's relationship to the men who were very much dead when that statement was made. Jesus is pointing out that God Himself is saying (in the part of the Old Testament the Sadducees dogmatically said they believed) "I am Abraham's God today. It isn't that I view myself as their God today, they view me as their God today. I am currently their God because they currently exist."

Jesus is saying that, while death is a separation, it isn't a conclusion. Those words mean so much to me today and I hope they bring hope to many of you, as well. Friday, I was at the funeral of George Kessel, and Saturday, I was at the funeral of Creighton MacConnell. What hope there is to think when we breathe our last breath on this earth, we don't cease to exist. For those who have placed their faith in Jesus, our last breath in this world becomes our first breath in the world that is to come. If you have lost a loved one recently who was trusting in Jesus, right now they are in the presence of God. He knows them and they know Him. He is their God, and they are His people and they are more alive today in His presence than they have ever been.

He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and your loved ones in Christ, today, this very moment. He is the God of the living, not the dead!

The Sadducees had been reading those words their entire lives, but they had wandered so far from the path of truth that they wouldn't allow for any other meaning than the one they had always understood. And the consequences were devastating. Ideas have consequences. What we believe determines how we live. Their everyday lives were dramatically affected. They lived in a pursuit of power and influence and wealth precisely because they had a theology that said this life on earth is all there is. They were merely living out what they really believed.

Ultimately, it cost them their souls. They rejected Jesus and His claim of resurrection. Even after Jesus died and rose again, they refused to believe it. In Acts 23, when Paul was brought before the religious leaders in Jerusalem, he realized there were Sadducees on the council of elders and he brought up the resurrection, knowing they would reject him because of it (and he knew they would get in a fight with the Pharisees over it), which is precisely what they did.

They were so self-deceived by their lack of knowledge of the Scriptures and God's power that they literally rejected Jesus and rejected anyone who represented Jesus.

And from this exchange, we learn an incredibly valuable lesson, it's our Big Idea for today...

Big Idea: We wander dangerously astray when we do not know the Word and Power of God.

Brothers and sisters, it's easy for us to look down our noses at the knuckle-headed Sadducees for wandering from the truth of God's word and Power. But I want to encourage us not to dismiss the fact that we are all susceptible to the same root issues. Not that we will wander from truth in a way that will cause us to lose our souls, but that we might wander away from God's good design for our lives

and the powerful transformation Jesus brings as we take Him as His word. Christ's assessment of the Sadducees serves as a massive warning to each and every one of us.

And, in the time we have remaining, I want us to hear the warning from Jesus' words and beware of fostering a lack of knowledge of God's word and power.

Beware of wandering due to not knowing the Word of God.

The Bible is filled with promises that are attached to knowing and believing the Word of God.

- *Psalm 1:3 says that the person who meditates on the Word of God... "is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."*
- *Psalm 119:9 says a young man keeps his way of life pure... "by guarding it according to your word."*
- *1 Timothy 3:15 says the Word of God is... "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."*
- *In Matthew 4:4, Jesus rebuked the temptation of Satan by saying... "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

The entire Christian life is lived by faith in the truth and promises of Jesus that are revealed in the Word of God, the Bible. Here's what that means, you cannot live by faith in truth you don't know, and you can't claim promises by faith if you don't know what Christ's promises are.

So, let me share with you a couple contributing factors that lead to us living without a functional knowledge of God's Word.

Biblical Ignorance

The most obvious reason that people live without an accurate knowledge of God's Word is simply due to the fact that they have never actually read the whole Bible. They just don't know what the Bible teaches. I'm not saying any of us will have the whole bible memorized or will perfectly understand anything the bible teaches let alone all that the Bible has to say. What I am saying is that when we only have bits and pieces of the Bible at our disposal in life, we are vulnerable to misinterpretations at best and the lies of the enemy at worst...the oldest trick in the enemy's book isn't to deny the Bible, it's to distort the Bible and that has a major impact on how we live.

Let me give you a quick example. Every now and then, I'll hear parents talk about a grace-based approach to parenting. And I think it's a very important (and biblical) thing that we have a grace-based approach to parenting.

But, if we don't have a robust understanding of biblical truth, we will hear that term and potentially think that grace means we allow our children to do anything they naturally want to do without experiencing the God-honoring consequences of discipline. So, while our toddlers are tearing down the restaurant and terrorizing the patrons, we are sitting in our booth claiming its grace.

- *Titus 2:11-12 - For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,*
- *Hebrews 12:6 – For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.*

Discipline (done in a way that glorifies God and represents the gospel of Jesus) is gracious. Grace without Christ-honoring discipline isn't gracious.

My point is that we wander from God's design for parenting when we lack knowledge of what God's word actually says. I find this to be true about all kinds of things...people misrepresent what the Bible says about worship, about judging others, about what forgiveness is and isn't, about what it means to love our neighbors, and most importantly of all, what the Bible says is true for us because of Jesus.

Being ignorant of biblical truth puts us at risk of wandering from the path of truth...and the Sadducees remind us that comes with devastating consequences.

What would it look like if you exchanged casually reading parts of the Bible for carefully studying the whole Bible? If you need help getting started, I want to encourage you to talk with one of our pastors this morning or sometime in the near future. If you need a resource, David Ivey, from our church can help you. You can also jump into our Wednesday night study of the Book of Acts. It's a great format for learning to read verse by verse through books of the Bible.

But it isn't just biblical ignorance that causes us to live without a functional knowledge of God's word...

Spiritual Obstinace

The Sadducees weren't ignorant of what the Bible says, they had read the Torah countless times...they knew what it said, so they weren't really ignorant. But they were obstinate. They refused to accept any interpretation of Scripture than the one they had always held. They brought their preconceived ideas to the Bible, and rather than humbly bend their way of thinking to the Bible, they worked to bend the bible toward their way of thinking. And be careful not to assume this is absent from your life.

When you read the Bible, are you actively asking the Lord to correct your misunderstandings and errors or are you looking for ways to justify yourself and your way of living?

But 2 Timothy 3:16 says, *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

If you come away from the Scriptures and almost always feel justified in the way you are living, you might want to re-examine your approach to Bible study. The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to correct and convict the people of God. Now, I'm not saying you should always feel terrible while you

read the Bible, not at all. The Scripture is a source of Good News for us in Jesus. It refreshes our souls and encourages us in light of Christ.

The Word of God profits us, in part, by correcting and reproofing us. So, what would it look like if you began reading the bible every day and humbly asking the Holy Spirit to use the Word to reprove and correct you in love?

Beware of wandering due to not knowing the Power of God.

Mark 12:24 Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?"

I want you to carefully notice what Jesus is saying here. He points to the reason they have wandered from the path of truth. How many reasons does Jesus give? It looks like two: they didn't know the Scriptures or the power of God.

But Jesus explicitly says there is one reason. What's the point? The point is that knowing the Scriptures must be connected to believing in the power of God or we will go astray. It's a both/and proposition. That's why a head full of Bible knowledge is no guarantee of spiritual maturity. The Sadducees would not believe in the resurrection, not because the bible doesn't teach it, but because they refused to believe God can do it. They didn't understand how God could do it so they wouldn't believe He will.

And, while a lack of knowledge about the Word of God is certainly an issue to some extent in almost all of our lives, I'm convinced that, more often than not, the root issue is a failure to comprehend or believe in the power of God.

We stumble at the word of God because we just don't comprehend how God is strong enough to do what He says. That's what the author of Hebrews says was the problem with the people of Israel when they were delivered from Egypt but failed to enter the land God promised to give them.

Hebrews 4:2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.

The people heard the promise that God would give them the land, but they just didn't believe Him. They saw how big and strong the inhabitants of the land were and failed to believe God's power was sufficient to defeat their enemies and give them the land. So, the word was of no benefit to them, and they wandered in the wilderness until an entire generation died off.

Knowing God's word doesn't benefit us unless it's united to faith in God's power. And I wonder where you might be close to wandering from the path of truth because you are struggling to believe God is strong enough to do what He says even if you don't understand how He'll do it.

If you are trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior...

- God promises to make you holy and blameless and completely forgiven of all your sins. (Ephesians 1:4, 7). Do you believe He is strong enough to do what He says?
- God promises to make you a new creation, freed from the power of sin and addiction and the old patterns of your life. (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6) Do you believe He is strong enough to do what He says?
- God promises to give you His Holy Spirit so that Jesus Himself will live through you in resurrection power as (Galatians 2:20). Do you believe He is strong enough to do what He says?
- He's promised to supply our every need...
- He's promised to give us hope in our grief and comfort in our pain...
- He's promised to thwart every work of our enemy and work every single thing in our lives for our good...
- He's promised to give us an inheritance in Heaven and pleasure forevermore...

What promise of Scripture do you already know but are struggling to believe? Will you ask the Lord to strengthen your faith? You don't have to understand how He will do what He has promised to do, you simply have to take Him at His word.