**The God of the Living**

October 20, 2013

Mark 12:18-27

Key Verse 12:27 “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”

In today’s passage, the Sadducees come to Jesus with a question about marriage at the resurrection. The Sadducees had it all: wealth, success, recognition and knowledge. However, despite all they had, they did not know the Scriptures and the power of God. They did not know that God is the God of the living. They were spiritually bankrupt people. So with a broken shepherd heart, Jesus taught them why they were in error with their ridiculous question. From this passage, may God help us have a new attitude towards the Scriptures; the holy Bible. May God reveal himself to you personally through the Scriptures so that you may know that he is the living God who raises the dead and who gives us the glorious hope of resurrection.

I. “At the resurrection, whose wife will she be?” (18-23)

Look at verse 18. “Then the Sadducees, who say that there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.” In the previous passage, the Pharisees and the Herodians tried to trap Jesus with a trick question about taxes. They asked him, “Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn’t we?” They thought they had trapped Jesus with this question. Jesus answered them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” This answer totally amazed them. They could not say anything. Now the Sadducees were rivals of the Pharisees. When they saw that the Pharisees had been outwitted by Jesus, they thought, “Now we can do better. We will have a better question for Jesus that he can’t possibly answer!” The Sadducees wanted to defeat the Pharisees with a question that they thought was too difficult for Jesus. In this way they thought that more people would honor them and recognize them as intellectual giants and praise them.

Who were the Sadducees? The Sadducees were a group of Jewish leaders, many of them priests, who did not believe in the resurrection. They also denied that there was a spiritual world. They denied the existence of angels and demons. They studied the Bible, but not the whole Bible. They picked and chose what they thought might be good for them, the other parts they ignored. Since they were priests, their most favorite book was Leviticus which emphasizes bringing offering to God. Their most favorite sermon was, “If you bring a lot of offerings to God, God will bless you even more and make you rich and powerful and live happily ever after in this world,” based on Leviticus 26:2-4. The other parts of the Bible such as the Psalms and the prophets, they did not study because it challenged them to examine their hearts before God and to repent. For example, Isaiah 1:11 says, “‘The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me...I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.” If they teach this word, people will not bring offerings to the temple and their income will be affected greatly.

These Sadducees came to Jesus with a strange and incredible question. This question reveals what their inner life was like. Look at verses 19-22. “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 have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?” What an incredible story! What a ridiculous story! It is true from the Bible that if a woman had a husband who died and she did not bear any children with him, then she was to marry the next brother and to have children through him. The reason was to continue the family line (Deut.25:5-10). The purpose of the law was to give life, but the Sadducees used this law to make up a story about death. They tried to make the idea of resurrection seem ridiculous. They thought that by this story they could make Jesus really stumble.

What about this story reveals their dark inner lives? In this story, a woman married seven times and all of her husbands died. She went to seven wedding ceremonies and also seven funeral services. The word “death” is mentioned many times. After all her husbands die and she becomes a widow seven times, she also dies. Without resurrection faith and resurrection hope, there is only death to think about. Their lives were dark with the thoughts of death. Though they were wealthy and successful people, they could not escape their thoughts of death. When one has no resurrection faith and hope, one cannot avoid thoughts of fatalism, fear and anxiety because they are trying to preserve their fleeting life on this world.

What else did they think about? They were concerned with “whose wife will she be?” This was their question, “Whose wife will she be at the resurrection?” They wanted to know who would possess the woman; the first husband, or the one who loved her the most, or they should determine by lot. Their desires were for only what they could grab in this world and to hold onto. Their hopes were in the things that perish and spoil and fade away. Their question shows their preoccupation with only this world. All they have to live for is the moment, which explains their focus on possessing wealth and power. It explains their impatience and rudeness. They don’t have time for the life-long work of developing patience and other virtues because there is no payoff at the end. They talked about marriage. To people, marriage is an important part of life. Without resurrection faith and hope, marriage is the high point of one’s life. When one becomes a teenager, one starts to think about marriage. As one gets older, if they are not engaged or married, they begin to worry about marriage. They become impatient and fatalistic and they wonder, “Who will be my husband?” or “Who will be my wife?” The Sadducees’ question shows that they had no spiritual life. They denied the spiritual life and the resurrection of the dead and only thought about the physical world. Let’s see how Jesus answered their ridiculous question.

II. The God of the living (24-27)

Look at verses 24-25, “Jesus replied, ‘Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.’” The Sadducees were in error because they did not know two things.

**First**, they did not know the Scriptures. This means they did not study the Bible to accept it as the absolute word of God. When they read the Bible, they picked and chose what they liked and ignored and skipped over the parts that they didn’t like. They just tried to stimulate their minds but didn’t allow the word of God to touch their hearts. This is why they had such a ridiculous question and why their hearts and minds were so fatalistic and anxious and materialistic. It is easy to have this kind of attitude when we read the Bible. There are parts of the Bible that we like to read; the ones that talk about God’s blessings and God’s love. We like to hear things that sound good to us. But other parts of the Bible that talk about commitment, sacrifice and persecutions, we want to avoid. When we have such a liberal attitude towards the Bible, the word of God cannot work in our hearts and we can not meet God personally. Then it is easy to be confused and ask confusing and ridiculous things like the Sadducees and to be spiritually blind like the Sadducees were. Most people don’t know the Bible even though they go to church most of their lives. They remain the same and God is very vague and distant to them. Thank God that in UBF we can focus our hearts on the Scriptures. Because the Sadducees did not know the Scriptures, they could not experience the spiritual joy and peace of knowing God. This was why their question was so ridiculous and fatalistic.

**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 and 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.” Here, Jesus teaches that in heaven there will be no marriage. There will be no wedding ceremonies either. Heaven is not an extension of this world. It is different from this world and we will be different. How different? Jesus says that we will be like the angels. What does this mean? It means that our bodies will be different. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 about this. He says, “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. 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…” While on this earth, we suffer because our bodies are weak and vulnerable to sickness and disease. As we get older, we get tired easily. We find ourselves saying, “If I only had a little more energy, then I would be happy.” This week many students are taking midterm tests. We wish that we are smart like Einstein. Some of us suffer from allergies. In heaven, there will be no allergies to suffer from. In heaven, our bodies will be perfect, like the Lord Jesus (1 Cor.15:49). We won’t have to worry about dieting or exercising.

Jesus did not stop there in teaching the Sadducees. He went on to teach them about the God of the living from the Bible, the one whom they had denied by their life style and thought life. Let’s read what Jesus said in verses 26-27: “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? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!’” When God said this, he showed that he is the God of the resurrection when he used the words “I am” to identify himself to Moses. The words “I am” are in the present tense. This means that to God, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still alive. This is because they are with him in heaven, living forever. He did not say, “I was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” He said “I am.” As you know, Abraham is the father of Isaac and Isaac is the father of Jacob. How can God be God of three generations? The only explanation is that they are all alive in God. Sh. Jacob Kang in Korea named his son Isaac. Someone pointed out that Isaac was the father of Jacob. It looks weird. Sh. Jacob answered, “In the kingdom of God we will all be brothers.” I was moved by his resurrection faith.

Look at verse 27 again. “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!” To this great God, there are two kinds of people: the dead and the living. The dead are those who do not have faith in the living God 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 lesson about life into a story of death. 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 fathers…” 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 deliver his people from slavery. The question is, are we the living or the 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. We can have hope that endure hardships. We can be thankful and joyful and positive all the time, finding some possibility in any situation.

May God help us to know and believe the Scriptures and to know the power of God so that personal revival may come to our hearts. May God reveal himself to us in a very personal way as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and as the God of the living.