**God Is the God of the Living**

**(God is not a funeral director)**

September 20, 2020

Mark 12:18-27

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

Someone wrote, “Much of philosophy is about how to conquer the fear of death. The fear of death is one of the primary driving forces of human action.”” Socrates said, “Practicing philosophy in the right way is, in fact, training to die easily.” Especially today, because of COVID-19, death became very real to many. Yet many people reject belief in the resurrection. They are living in denial and want to distract themselves from death. That is why we pay movie, singing, and sports stars millions of dollars to keep our minds occupied so we don’t have to think about our deaths. So no one should be surprised that people are depressed, neurotic, and even psychotic because the fear of death scares them. Duke University philosopher Alex Rosenberg wrote a book, called, “The Atheist’s Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life Without Illusions.” His advice for dealing with death fears is to take a Prozac, and “Get high with drugs!” Suicide is a symptom of the fear of death because it allows you to control that which controls you.

In today’s passage, we meet the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection. They had it all: wealth, success, recognition and knowledge. The story they brought to Jesus 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 died and she became a widow seven times, she also died. 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 the 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 in this world. Jesus said to them, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!” God is the God of the living. He is not a funeral director. All will be resurrected, some to eternal life, the others to be condemned.

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?” They thought they had trapped Jesus with this question. Jesus answered them, “Give back 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 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.

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 26:3-5. 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 repent. For example, Isaiah 1:11-13 says, “I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats…Stop bringing meaningless offerings!” 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. 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! Deuteronomy 25:5-10 says 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 have children through him. The reason was to continue the family line. The purpose of this 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 ridiculous. They thought that by this story they could make Jesus really foolish. In fact, if we think of heaven as an extension of this world, many things are ridiculous. For example, with what kind of resurrection body are we going to be raised? Will I be raised in an ugly old body? What if I lost my arm in an accident? Will I have an arm in heaven? If I get cremated, will I have a body in heaven? Will I have OCD and anxieties in heaven. In that case, I don’t want to go to heaven and live forever.

The Sadducees’ question was, “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 would have a bachelorette game. 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 many people, marriage is an important part of life. Without resurrection faith and hope, marriage is the focal point of one’s life. When one becomes a teenager, he/she 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, “Will I ever get married? I will be lonely forever.” The Sadducees 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. 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. 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 an attitude towards the Bible, the word of God cannot work in our hearts and we cannot meet God personally. Then it is easy to be confused and ask confusing and ridiculous things like the Sadducees and to be spiritually blind. One person commented that our resurrection bodies will have mouth but will not have bottom because we will eat at a heavenly banquet but going to bathroom seems repulsive. That is ridiculous. Most people don’t know the Bible even though they go to church. Because the Sadducees did not know the Scriptures, they could not experience the spiritual joy and peace of knowing God. This is 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 again. “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. 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 only I had a little more energy!” 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, there will be no COVID-19. In this world, many young people want to get married because they are lonely. They want intimacy. But in heaven, everyone will know each other. We will know God. We will never be lonely. In heaven, our bodies will be perfect, like our Lord Jesus (1 Cor.15:49).

The Sadducees studied the Five Books of Moses diligently and they could not find the teaching on resurrection there. Jesus pointed out their ignorance. Look at verses 26-27: “Now about the dead rising---have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the burning 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 all 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 the God of three generations simultaneously? The only explanation is that they are all alive in God. Luke 20:38 says, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.” God says, “I am the God of these men, and I am not a God worshiped by corpses.” Sh. Jacob Kang in Korea named his son Isaac. Someone pointed out that Isaac was the father of Jacob. It looks weird. He answered, “In the kingdom of God we will all be brothers.” I was moved by his resurrection faith. Some people ask, “How could I ever be happy in heaven if any of my family is in hell? I don’t want to go to heaven without my loving wife.” It comes from the ignorance of the power of God. God will change our bodies and our relationship. In heaven, we will have a new family relationship. Our brothers and sisters will be those in Christ.

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. He was a prince in Egypt. He thought that he could deliver his people from slavery with his own strength. So he killed an Egyptian, and he thought that his own people would recognize that God was using him to rescue them. But his own people rejected him, saying, “Who made you ruler over us?” Moses ran away to Midian and lived in the wilderness for 40 years as a shepherd. His dream was dead. He thought that his life was over. But then God met him through the burning bush and said, “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” God’s words pierced his soul. Moses began to recognize God’s presence. He began to rely on God’s power. God used him to deliver his people from slavery. The question is, are you 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 no matter how hard it looks. The worst sin is not infecting others with COVID-19, but not believing in the resurrection because it offends God who is the God of the living.

May God help us to believe in the God of the living so that we may live a victorious life without fear, without despair, and without anxiety.

Big Idea: There is no death in the God of the living