Mark Lesson 41 (2023)

**THE GOD OF THE LIVING**

Mark 12:18-27

Key Verse: 12:27

“He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”

As believers in Christ, we believe that God our Father is immortal, which means God never grows old or dies. But humans are mortal. We grow old and die someday, with no exception. Even though death is the norm for humans, and we always hear people dying everywhere, death remains a mystery to us. We wonder what happens to us after we die. *“Is there life after death?”* *“Is there a resurrection of the dead?”* Honestly, most of us feel uncomfortable thinking about it.

In today’s passage, Jesus engages in a thought-provoking discussion about the resurrection of the dead with some Sadducees. Through the encounter with the Sadducees, Jesus unveils profound truths about the resurrection and reminds us of the power and glory of the living God. He told the Sadducees, “God is not the God of the dead but of the living. You are badly mistaken!” This morning, let us ponder what Jesus meant when he said that God is the God of the living, not of the dead.

Look at verse 18. “Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.” The Sadducees were one of the religious sects of the Jews in Jesus’ time, along with the Pharisees and the Essenes. Unlike the Pharisees, who recognized the authority of the oral traditions of the elders, like Mishnah and Talmud, the Sadducees didn’t recognize them. Compared to the Pharisees, the Sadducees were a relatively small group within the Jewish society. They were mainly urban, wealthy, educated, and aristocratic. Most priests who took care of the Jerusalem Temple were the Sadducees. They claimed only the Pentateuch (the Torah), the written law of Moses, to be the divinely authorized Scripture. They believed in politics, wealth, and success in this life rather than in spiritual things, such as resurrection, life after death, angels, demons, or the heavenly kingdom.

In verses 19-23, we see that the Sadducees approached Jesus with a hypothetical scenario centered around the idea of resurrection. They tried to discredit the concept of life after death. Look at verses 19-23. “‘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 raise up offspring 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?”

Their hypothetical case was based on Moses’ law, particularly Deuteronomy 25:5-6, in which Moses stated that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law by producing a son for his dead brother. Since their case was based on Moses’ command in the Torah, it seemed to carry much weight. Particularly, the last question, *“At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”* made resurrection profoundly absurd. There will be bloody fights among the brothers in heaven. (Pic#1)

The Sadducees might have many reasons not to believe in the resurrection. It’s easy to deny resurrection because we are unfamiliar with it, which sounds unrealistic. Besides that, we have so many things to worry about in our day-to-day lives. So, some people completely dismiss the idea of resurrection, while others still believe in it without giving it much thought because you have nothing to lose by considering it.

However, our faith in Christ is not solid in the resurrection; it can be ineffective and eventually fade. If there is no resurrection or life after death, we might do whatever we want, eating and drinking, for tomorrow, we will die. In other words, as Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:29-34, if there is no resurrection, as the Sadducees claimed, there is no true salvation, eternal, or the kingdom of God. The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of the Christian faith. Our lifestyle reveals whether we truly believe in life after death or resurrection. Jesus said to his disciples, “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.” (Jn. 5:28-29)

In verses 24-27, Jesus responded to the Sadducees’ question. In his response, Jesus took this opportunity to enlighten his audience about the realities of God’s kingdom. It’s significant that Jesus taught about resurrection a few days before his death and resurrection in Jerusalem.

Jesus first pointed out their limited understanding of the Scripture and God’s power. Look at verse 24. “Jesus replied, ‘Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?’ It was a kind of rebuke to the Sadducees. According to Jesus’ rebuke, the Sadducees didn’t believe in the resurrection because they did not understand God’s revelation about resurrection in the Scripture, especially the Pentateuch. Probably, they didn’t know that the five books of Moses revealed the truth of the resurrection. They also didn’t believe in the resurrection because they didn’t realize that God was powerful enough to raise the dead and transform them into a different type of life. They were professionally religious, but in their lifestyle and thoughts atheistic.

A challenging thought is that even though we might think that we already know the Bible, we may have missed the critical point of God’s revelation in the Bible. Jesus rebuked the Sadducees for their lack of understanding of the Scripture. Therefore, reading and rereading the Scripture carefully and prayerfully is necessary, as if we search for stars in the night sky. (Pic#2) It reminds us of what Apostle Paul said in his letter, "We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Pe. 1:19-21)

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.” The Sadducees challenged the idea of resurrection, assuming that our life in heaven continues our lives in this world. But according to Jesus, that’s not the case at the resurrection.

First, Jesus emphasizes that marriage is only an earthly institution and will not be a part of the eternal kingdom. I have been married to my wife, Joy, for the last 43 years. But when we get to heaven, we will not be husband and wife but remain best friends to each other and brothers and sisters in Christ. My relationship with my children and grandchildren in heaven will not be the same as on this earth.

By saying, “They will be like the angels in heaven,” Jesus didn’t mean we would become angels with wings and halos. (Pic#3) No. Jesus’ point was that our resurrected body is not like the earthly body. It will be a new and transformed one. A critical truth about our resurrected state is that it transcends the limitations of earthly relationships and bears a likeness to the angels, who are the ministering spirits with heavenly bodies.

We are curious about what kind of body we will have when resurrected. After many toiling years, our earthly bodies are no longer strong or beautiful. Our tired bodies will have to rest. We will all fall asleep. It’s good to fall asleep when you are tired. (Pic#4) Physical death is likened to night sleep in the Bible. Then we will wake up in a fantastic resurrection body. Apostle Paul shares it in 1 Corinthians 15:41-45. “The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another, and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: ‘The first man Adam became a living being,’ the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.’” I am excited and looking forward to having this heavenly body, which is immortal and imperishable and not subjected to pain or physical limitations. We may be as free as a bird. God our Father, almighty, will give what he had designed for his beloved children.

In verse 26, Jesus shows how the Pentateuch, the Books of Moses, taught about resurrection, which the Sadducees failed to see. Look at verse 26. “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?’” Here, Jesus quoted Exodus 3:6, in which God taught Moses the continued human existence even after death. When God spoke to Moses, his late ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with whom God made his covenant, had been dead and buried for the last 500-600 years. But God was telling Moses that they were still living in the presence of God in heaven, for he told him, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” In other words, God's covenant with each of them would be ineffective if they died. But it’s still effective because they are not dead but still alive in his presence.

According to Jesus, we can almost say that the resurrection of the dead was one of the main points of the book of Moses, which the Sadducees failed to see. Why? It’s because they concluded that if the physical part of man died, the whole person ceased to exist. But that’s not true. Jesus corrected their view of human life. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive in the presence of God. Their souls continue to live with God in heaven, and at the final resurrection, their bodies will be transformed into glorious bodies, free from sin and imperfection.

As believers in Christ, we believe in the resurrection of the dead and eternal life through faith in Chris Jesus. When we die, our souls will not die but live with God, and at the final resurrection, our bodies which might have turned to dust, will come back to life, being transformed into glorious heavenly bodies.

Jesus concludes his teaching in verse 27 by telling them, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!” When Jesus said, “He is not the God of the death, but of the living,” he emphasized the reality of the resurrection and the eternal life of believers. It’s easy to believe the reality of death and become pessimistic like the Sadducees. But Jesus said they were severely mistaken because God our Father is not the God of the dead but of the living. It means that God is the living God and the God of the living, not the dead. In other words, we have an everlasting relationship with God our Father. Physical death is not the end of everything. Even after physical death, we are alive in the presence of God, experiencing a new and everlasting life with him. Therefore, we don’t need to be afraid of death or dying. Our physical death is the beginning of a new and eternal life.

When Jesus said, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living,” he might also be speaking to the Sadducees that he was the God of the living and the living God. What a great revelation to them! When Martha, the sister of Lazarus who died, came to meet Jesus in tears, he revealed himself to her as the living God by saying, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die, and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” After this, he also told Philip, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (Jn. 14:9)

It's marvelous that the living God came to this world to be with us. He revealed his glory by humbly serving us with love and compassion. He sacrificed himself on the cross and rose again. Thus, he proved himself to be the living God.

Now what does it mean to us? Living in this world, we feel the reality of death surrounds us. It’s easy for us to be overwhelmed with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Like Moses, who met the God of the living in the wilderness, we also must meet the God of the living in the harsh reality of the wilderness in our days. When Jesus said, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living,” we must remember that we have an inseparable love relationship with God. He proved himself to be the living God and the God of the living through his resurrection from death. We are safe and secure in and through him no matter what circumstances we may be in. We have a glorious hope of resurrection in and through Christ Jesus. May we live our lives in the hope of the glorious resurrection by following the footstep of Christ. May we also approach him confidently and remain intimate by recognizing his presence in our daily walk.