

Mark 12:18-27

"That Is Why They Are Sadd-U-Cee"

Shall we open our Bibles this morning to Mark 12:18 as we continue our studies through Mark's gospel?

Mark started, in chapter 11, taking us to the final week of the Lord's earthly ministry. We call it the Passion Week. And if you'll notice, Mark spends a third of the gospel writing about this final week. That's about right for all of the gospels. More is given to this time than any other because this is the purpose for His coming. So, lots of information and things to think about and to learn from as Jesus comes to Jerusalem with the throngs of the people, His disciples. It's Passover, except this year He's going to be the Passover Lamb, the One that was promised to save men from their sins.

Jesus would arrive on Saturday in Bethany. It is a twenty-mile hike or so from Jericho, up to the hills outside of Jerusalem. He stayed at Mary and Martha and Lazarus' house through Wednesday night; and then Thursday night spent His evening in the Garden of Gethsemane before being tried during the night and taken to the cross on Friday morning.

But on Sunday of Passion Week, He rode triumphantly into town as the proclamation that He was the One that was promised. Zechariah 9:9 talks about Him riding into town on a donkey, promising life to those who would believe in Him. The people were thrilled by what they saw and heard. They laid down their robes, they sang the psalms, they were sure this political deliverer was just going to take Rome out. And so, while the people sang, Jesus wept because He hadn't come to be a political deliverer. He'd come to be a Savior from the people's sins, and they didn't understand it, weren't listening, and the consequence wouldn't be good. And Jesus wept over what would come to the nation as a result. He ended the day by, on Sunday, going into the temple, looking around, viewing the activities and leaving.

On Monday morning, leaving Bethany and heading up over the hill towards the Temple Mount, Jesus cursed a fig tree that had looked to have promise; it had at least leaves (from afar) - there should be some spring fruit, there was none. And Jesus not only cursed it, but He used it as a figurative example (like the Lord had done throughout the Scriptures) of Israel as a nation - both a vineyard and a fig

tree. And so He spoke of the nation's unwillingness to hear Him, that He had come to His own, but they weren't receiving Him. And He headed from there down to the temple. He had cleansed it three and a half years earlier. He does it again. He turns over the tables, and the money changers and the animals go running. And there must have been quite an event. But the Lord said, "This is My Father's house. You've made it a den of thieves." And John 12, by the way, beginning in chapter 20, covers the rest of Monday - verses 20-50.

On Tuesday morning of Passion Week, Peter calls attention - as they go back into town - how the fig tree had withered at the very root. And Jesus spoke to Peter and the boys about forgiveness and faith and the need to trust in Him, that forgiveness would come through His Son. The rest of Tuesday (and it's the biggest day, really, until we get to Friday, that the Lord gives us) is filled with a bunch of folks coming to confront the Lord: antagonistic groups. They've all got an agenda. None of them want anything to do with the Lord. It is a desperate attempt to get Him away from the people that loved Him and were following Him, and they wanted to either put some sourness into that relationship or, even better, get Him into some legal hot water with the Romans. We do read in John 11 that the idea of putting Jesus to death wasn't new; they'd been hatching this for a year. And they had wanted to wait until after the people went home - the millions of folks that were in town - but they couldn't wait, they thought. And so, in their own warped minds, the only solution to undermining His popularity and securing their own positions was to have Him killed.

Overall, these religious leaders show the unwillingness of the nation to receive the promised Messiah that was certainly proven to them in His fulfillment of the Scriptures. On an individual level, self-righteousness makes you blind, and you don't need a Savior if you think you've got it all together. But Jesus, in the midst of all that He was facing at this critical time, is under such pressure and yet shows such grace. He entertains all these folks. He accommodates every group. He almost seems to just want to jar their sensibilities to bring them to a place where they go, "Oh, you know, He's right, we're wrong;" shake their foundations, maybe bring them to salvation.

Well, back in verse 27 of chapter 11, the first group came to question His authority. They challenged Him. Jesus didn't answer their question, "By what authority are You doing this?" He just said, "Hey, John's baptism, did the Lord send him or not?" And they didn't really have a position now. They didn't believe in

John the Baptist. But the people did. If they said "No," the people would be angry; if they said "Yes, it was from heaven," then the Lord said, "Why didn't you listen to him? Be baptized. Repent." So they said, "We can't say," and the Lord said, "Yeah, I'm not going to tell you why I'm here, either." But He did give to them a parable, if you will, of the vinedressers and of their unfaithfulness and self-service and how that they were now planning to kill the Son so that the vineyard could be theirs, and the Lord said, "It's not going to work." And the men knew that He was speaking about them. In fact, in chapter 12:12 it says they sought to lay hold on Him, but they couldn't because they feared the crowds.

Last time - we met last Sunday - we met a couple of groups who really didn't get along with each other very well: the Herodian and the Pharisees. And they came to challenge Jesus about coinage and taxation - pointed out that the Roman coins had a picture of Caesar, who thought he was God, and, "Should we even bother to deal with this at all?" And Jesus said, "Well, you give it to Caesar if it belongs to him. Is his picture on it? Great. But render to God the things that belong to God." And the word "render" means pay what you owe. "If you owe it to Caesar, give it to Caesar. But you owe your life to the Lord. Are you doing that?" And they kind of went away, kind of, "Wow, we thought we had Him."

Well this morning we come to one final group to challenge Jesus. It's the final confrontation. It's from verse 18 here down through verse 27, and it involves the Sadducees, a sect of the religious leaders - completely secular; they didn't believe in anything after death. There was, to them, no life after death. And we always make the joke - they were sad, you see, because of it. They couldn't get it. How could you live a life and figure this is all there is? How can justice be had, and how can hope be found?

We read in verse 18, "Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him; and they asked Him, saying." Matthew said it was the same day. We realize it's late Tuesday afternoon. You would think, after all of these groups came and went, that somebody, even the slowest of learners, would have concluded that maybe Jesus is just a bit wiser than they are. You know, you'd want one guy to go, "I'm giving up." And we might actually meet that fellow next week, although he still comes challenging the Lord. A scribe that comes next week seems to have gotten a little bit of, maybe, the truth through all of these confrontations. We can't be sure of that. But here they come to challenge Jesus again. And that's the problem with being self-righteous, you know. You can't see that you're not right. And so

the Sadducees are coming to take on the King of kings. The Sadducees were descendants of a priest named Zadok. He was a fellow that served under David and Solomon, and, when he died, his descendants became these Sadducees. They had the privilege of serving in the temple after the Babylonian captivity. But by the time of Jesus, they had complete control of the temple; all of the businesses, all of the money-making schemes in Jerusalem, they locked it down. In Acts 5:17, it says, "Then the high priest arose and all that were with him (which is of the sect of the Sadducees)." Literally everyone in any position of power at this time, religiously, were Sadducees. And that was the dominating group. They were smaller in number, but they were far more powerful. Though they didn't believe in life after death, they were the humanists, they lived strictly for financial gain. Josephus wrote in his antiquity books (the Jewish historian) that they were men of high esteem, well-to-do, supplied with money. In fact, he called these aristocrats from families who made a living in the temple trading in currency, "snobs." Josephus called them "snobs." He said they don't even like each other, but they walk around with their heads in the clouds. They give the impression that they're living in reality, and everyone that's coming to the temple is just foolish for wanting to walk with God. That was pretty much the attitude of the Sadducees towards the people who came to worship. They were, like I said, fewer in number than the Pharisees. They had more clout because of their money. They were tremendously friendly with Rome. In fact, whoever was in charge they didn't care as long as they could make a living at it. And usually you find them to be bitter rivals with the Pharisees. In fact, you might remember in Acts 23 that Paul was on trial, and when he stood before the trial, he recognized that there were quite a few Sadducees in the room and some Pharisees. And he said, "I think I'm on trial here today because I believe in the resurrection." And half of the people in the room - the Pharisees - went, "Well, he's all right." But the Sadducees were even angrier than before, and Paul was able to kind of turn these two groups against one another because the outcry was, "Hey, there's no life after death at all."

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection and life after death and angels. The Sadducees only believed in the Torah - only the first five books written by Moses. And they said, "There's no resurrection in the five books of Moses, so we don't believe in it." They say they believe in God. We don't know who that was, and it certainly didn't seem to matter with them. And they wanted nothing to do with Him. Both of them hated Jesus - the Sadducees because of His message of accountability before God and the fact that there was eternal life; the Pharisees because Jesus kind of exposed their wicked hearts and revealed, publicly, their

hypocrisy and all. Both of them envied His popularity. Pilate said, when they brought Him, he knew that they had come because they were envious of His popularity (Mark 15:10). So, put yourself in 1<sup>st</sup> century culture for a minute. You're a Jew who wants to worship God, and yet you find yourself being led by a bunch of wealthy, wicked men who don't even believe in life after death. Which is why, when you get to Acts 4, and you find Peter and John preaching Jesus, there is such an immediate reaction from the Sadducees who are grieved, it says in chapter 4:2 of Acts, that they were teaching people about the resurrection from the dead. It was an immediate conflict because these men were powerful men, and the church was rubbing them all, if you will, the wrong way. It might also explain to you why they joined in - the Sadducees - in John 12 to kill Lazarus once he'd been raised from the dead because they determined (in John's gospel) the reason many of the Jews came to Jesus was because Lazarus had supposedly been raised from the dead. "Let's kill him, make sure that doesn't happen again."

So that's the group that's now coming to Jesus, and I suspect that they came because they thought the Pharisees, and especially those from Galilee, were a bunch of country bumpkins, and so, "We have some arguments, being smart an all, that we don't think anybody can answer." So, unlike group 1 who came with challenging Jesus' authority, or group 2 which came through flattery, these guys just come like they are. They're just self-assured and smug. "Let us handle this. We'll shut Him down."

So they came to Jesus saying (the Sadducees, who say there's no resurrection), and they said to Him, verse 19, " 'Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.' " Now they came to Jesus quoting out of the Torah. There is a law in Deuteronomy 25; it is called the Levirate marriage (that's what it became to be known as), which stipulated that if a man's married brother died childless, the surviving brother should marry his widow and raise that first child that they had together and name him after his brother who had died, so that his name wouldn't be lost in Israel, and the inheritance for the family would continue in the same place. It was already being practiced by the Jews before the law. In fact, you can go to Genesis 38 and read in the case of Judah's sons and a woman named Tamar and the shame that was brought to the family for not carrying through on that commitment that the law required. In Deuteronomy 25, if a brother refused this obligation, and he didn't take that responsibility to raise a son after his dead brother, he was chastised publicly, he

was shamed in the gates before the elders, they untied his shoe, and they spit in his face. And they said, according to Deuteronomy 25, "This is the guy who had his shoe loosed," which I don't think was a compliment. But that was the way it was practiced. Now, sometimes the obligation was impossible to fulfill. You were married already, you had your own children, you had inheritance already committed or distributed. In those cases, refusing to do what the law demanded was approved. You could refuse because you weren't in a position to help. And then that responsibility would move down the line to the next qualified individual. You might remember the story of Ruth and Boaz, where this law of the kinsman redeemer takes center stage in their history. Ruth was widowed without a son. Her nearest kinsman was not a man that she liked named Boaz. And when they found out that she was in that position, Boaz went to an unnamed man who was in that position and yet, for a good cause, he refused. He said he had his responsibilities, his children were with him, he had divvied out his inheritance already, he was in no position. And Boaz gladly took that second spot because he loved Ruth, and he took her in and became her husband and all. But the reference to what these guys are trying to trap Jesus with - it was a well-known practice. We don't know if it was still being practiced in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. There's no record of it anywhere. But we do know that it was extremely well understood. And by the way, in the big picture, the kinsman redeemer picture in the Bible is certainly fulfilled with Jesus, who came and took our flesh like we have, became our next of kin, so to speak, and redeemed us by shedding His blood, giving us life, and then giving us His name. So, the big picture is obviously it points to Christ. Well, having stated this law (and they were pretty proud of themselves, I guess here), they now try to apply it to show the complete foolishness of believing in the resurrection, something, obviously, Jesus had spoken much about here in the temple during this week. So here's the principle or the law, verse 19.

Verse 20, " 'Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring. And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise. So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife.' " Now I suspect that this was their stock argument. The way it kind of comes running out of their mouth, it sounds like something maybe they've used in their debates a lot of times with the Pharisees to prove, maybe, the myth. "We don't believe in life after death. Here's why. How silly can you be?" It could be they borrowed this story from an apocryphal book of Tobit. I don't know if you've heard of the apocrypha. It's a

number of books that are adopted by certain denominations, which the Jews certainly didn't adopt. But the book of Tobit tells a tale of a woman who had seven husbands, and each of them was strangled by a demon on his wedding night. It sounds more like a Stephen King novel. But, anyway, they present their argument almost in the form of a riddle. "Okay, so there's the law, right, Jesus? So here's the application, right, Jesus? So you can see, Jesus, how ridiculous this is. This is a problem, isn't it?"

Now, how often do you suspect people take this same approach to God's Word to try to disprove or discredit it? They don't get it, somehow it doesn't apply, they can't put it in words that make any sense, and so they begin to step away from the truth all together. The old, "Can God make a rock so big He can't lift it? Oh, I thought He could do everything." Common sense versus divine wisdom. And unfortunately, oftentimes it's our common sense that's given more weight than the truth of God's Word. And so you find a lot of people in this position. This isn't unnatural for folks who don't want to believe. The Sadducees' position of unbelief is pretty easy to follow. Here's their argument - if I can't understand it or figure it out, it must not be true, and it must be wrong. And that logic is still applied to people today. My father and I had the greatest arguments about grace than with everyone I've ever met. I would talk to him about being forgiven and having all my sins cleansed, and he would bring up characters from history who were the most vile people. And then he would say, "You mean to tell me that (fill-in-the-blank) if they repent of their sins, Jesus is going to forgive them, and they're going to heaven?" I'd say, "Yes." He'd go, "That's ridiculous! While I, who try my best, am not going because I decide I can do it on my own?" "That's right." "Oh, that's not true." And we had these arguments for twelve years before he got saved. It was the big argument. I had a man say to me, "Well, if I can't get to heaven doing what I've done, then I'll just enjoy hell with my friends." Well, that's not understanding the Bible very well. Hell is not an enjoyable place, and your friends will no longer be your friends. I had a young man ask me, who had a friend who had a heart transplant, "In the resurrection, who gets the heart?" I don't know. But you'll be fine. Look, if someone dies and is buried, their body decomposes, the nutrients get into the soil, it goes into the grass, it's eaten by the cows, and then a guy goes to In-N-Out (Laughing). Whose calcium would that be? God knows.

I'll tell you what. If they were truly looking for an answer, two dead husbands would have been enough. Seven just seems to be a piling on, doesn't it? They should be more concerned with her cooking if seven people had died, I think.

There's death in the pot. But I see them sitting back very smugly like, "We got Him. That's it. What is He going to say now?" Right? What they didn't reckon on was they were speaking to the Lord of the Universe.

Jesus' answer, in verse 24, is an important one to know because He says, " 'Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?' " "Two specific areas that you have problems with, Sadducees. Number one, you don't know God's Word; and number two, you don't know God's power." And I would say to you that the key to answering any, or virtually every, hypothetical question that people would bring up to attack your faith or to attack the God you serve or His Word would be to go back to this answer. They're common-sense complaints, but the answers are always the same: you don't know who God is, and you don't know His Word. If you can get back to what is God saying, can He back it up? then we're in good shape. But there's always going to be a problem when we use human logic and human understanding as the sole parameters for truth, especially since God imparts truth not naturally but supernaturally in many ways. The word "err," you "err," is the Greek word "*planao*," and the word "*planao*" means a planet. And, at least in the days that it was used, a planet wasn't understood to be in any orbit; it just kind of wandered through the sky, aimlessly. We don't know where it's going. And that's how the implication of the word is; that if you don't know the Lord or you don't know His Word, you're kind of just wandering in this life. You're bouncing from one thing to the next, from one stipulation, postulation, to the next. You really never arrive at any truth. But yet God's Word and God's character, if you know Him, then things begin to make sense. I would say that someone that's not saved, when you read in the Bible, "overcome evil with good" doesn't sound very good. Overcome evil with more evil sounds better. "Don't worry, but pray." That doesn't make sense to anyone but Christians. "If I didn't have any reason to worry, I wouldn't worry." "Don't worry, pray. Love your enemies." "Oh, that's not going to work for me." "Give, and it shall be given to you. Want to save your life? Lose your life." Those are all truths that have to be settled by faith. But it is a battle of wisdom of man versus faith, isn't it? Isaiah said it today. We read it (Isaiah 55:8-9). "My ways are not your ways. They're beyond your finding out. They're higher than your ways." It was Paul who stood before King Agrippa, and he just laid out the gospel to him; and Agrippa just looked at him in disbelief. He couldn't believe what he was hearing, coming out of his mouth. And Paul said (Acts 26:8), "Why should it be such an incredible thing to you, Agrippa, that God should raise the dead?" It just didn't compute.

The Old Testament is filled with references, by the way, to life after death. Daniel talked about some arising out of the earth shall awake unto life and others to everlasting shame and contempt (Daniel 12:2). Job would write, early on, book of Genesis days - that's when Job was written (Job 14:14), "If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my appointed time I'll wait, until I see that change." Five chapters later he wrote (Job 19:25), "I know that my Redeemer lives and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, yet in my flesh I'll see God." That's Genesis. The Bible is filled with declarations of life after death. David wrote (Psalm 17:15), "I know when I wake I shall be satisfied. I'll awake in His likeness." Isaiah wrote (Isaiah 26:19), "Your dead shall live; and together with my dead body we're going to arise."

So, what was the problem here? They didn't know God's Word, and they didn't believe it. Nor did they know God's power. Wasn't it Abraham who took his son Isaac early on (Genesis 22) to be delivered to death because God had called him? And then it says of him he believed that God could even raise the dead if necessary to fulfill His Word because God will always keep His Word. Two mistakes.

He says, in verse 25, " 'For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.' " Luke says, and let me read it to you real quick, in chapter 20:34 (this is kind of the more complete answer, I guess), Jesus says, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." So Jesus answers, "Look, there's a this age where you get married, and then there's a that age where you don't. This age doesn't just end life. Human existence doesn't end in this age or in this world, 'ionios,' but in that 'ionios,' in that life. In life there's marriage, and one of the primary purposes of marriage, biblically, is to perpetuate the human race. Birth replaces those who die. He made us - God did - with built-in drives to keep us going. It's called homeostasis - air needs, thirst needs, hunger, bowels, bladder function, sex drives. Good thing you have them. Adam may have taken a look at Eve and said, "I goeth fishing," and that would have been the end of it. No good. Yet when you get to heaven, that is no longer a necessary relationship. And if you get to that age, and Jesus is very clear to say, "If you've been counted worthy to come to that age, there's no death there; you'll be like the angels, you'll be like a child of God, you'll be the offspring of the

resurrection of God's Son." If you have a good marriage, you might wonder, "How in the world can I improve on what I have?" And I would just say to you I have no idea except God says it's going to be superior to the one that you have now. We'll be like the angels. If you look through the Bible, Gabriel is found talking to Daniel; 550 years later, he showed up talking to Mary. Time doesn't seem to have any effect. Well, if I die, what kind of body will I have? Well, if it stays the way it is when I die, I want to die at 18. All we know is that God promises a new body that will be perfect for eternity; and what it'll look like and what it'll be like, I have no idea. All I know is this - 1 Corinthians 15:38 says God will give us a body that pleases Him. So I don't know what it'll look like, but God'll be happy with it, and I suspect if He is, I am.

Well, finally, to add one final punch to His word to these Sadducees, Jesus says, in verse 26 here, " 'But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses,' " (well, that's the only book they believed in) " '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.' " So Jesus takes one final helping swing at them, if you will, by going to the heart of the Torah (and to its author, Moses), the only books they believed and they argued there was no resurrection in. And Jesus said, "Even Moses," and I love that. "Even that fellow that you hang your hat on, when he was attracted to the burning bush, he wasn't consumed, and he came to it, and he was soon arguing with it. And God said to Moses, 'I AM.' " Not, 'I was.' Not, 'I will be.' Just, 'I AM.' It's the present-tense declaration of His character, and the implication is obvious. If He is the God of Jacob, Jacob had been dead 400 years by the time the Lord says this to Moses. "I AM the God of Jacob." If you say to me, "I was your father's friend," I would have to either conclude you're no longer friends, he doesn't like you any more, or you don't like him any more, or, more likely, that he's died. You were friends, but he's no longer with us. But when the Lord says, "I AM your father's friend," that conveys an ongoing relationship in the present tense. And those are the words that the Lord used, if you will, there in speaking with Moses at the burning bush. The three patriarchs, all found in the Torah, had a vital relationship with God that led to life after death in the present tense so that God was able to say to Moses, "I AM the God of Jacob. I AM. And I'm not the God of the dead, I'm the God of the living."

Well Luke tells us that, when Jesus gave them these words, some of the scribes said (Luke 20:39), " 'Master, You have well said,' and after that they dared not ask

Him any questions at all." And they walked away. And what we are left with from Mark and Matthew and Luke is a scribe who comes to Jesus, having understood and heard Him and trying to piece things together. He's still kind of contentious, but he's willing to learn. And it is his story that you find (beginning in verse 28) because what you want to see, obviously, is people who gather around the Lord, hear wisdom and are touched by it. At least one, Lord. Let there be some who turned and followed Him. There is an age coming you must be ready for, one where only Jesus can get you in the door, where you're counted worthy, you can get in.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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