

Trying to Trap Jesus over Theology

Mark 12:18-27 (09/13/15)

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Question: Where do you go when Satan hurls those darts of doubt about whether Christianity is really true? How do you know it's not just a big scam, like Islam or Hinduism or Scientology? Let me tell you where I go. I go straight to the empty tomb every time. If that tomb is empty, then Christianity is true. If Jesus body decomposed in that tomb, then the whole biblical story one big rip off! That's exactly what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15. If Christ was not raised from the dead, if the tomb is not empty, then we are of all people most miserable! But Paul shouted in triumph in 1 Corinthians 15:20 "But now Christ has been raised from the dead!" And if that tomb is empty, Christ is out there somewhere, and He's coming back and every knee will bow before Him! Are you ready?

Throughout history men have denied the resurrection of the body. The Greeks scoffed at it. Liberals today scoff at it. And in Jesus' day, the Sadducees, those who ran the temple, totally rejected the whole notion of the resurrection of the body. And yet the resurrection is the keystone of the gospel. That's exactly why Peter and Paul in Acts constantly preached the resurrection of Christ. "You crucified Him, but God raised Him up." Romans 10:9-10 says to be saved you must "believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead!"

In Acts 23 Paul was on trial before the Sanhedrin. He knew there were Pharisees and Sadducees there so he threw out a verbal hand grenade regarding the resurrection as the hope of Israel. That started a huge argument between the two groups! Acts 28:8, "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all." This morning we come to this very issue as the Sadducees try to trap Jesus with a "got-cha" question about the resurrection. Let's learn how Jesus handles these kinds of attacks on our faith.

Be prepared to encounter all kinds of questions that attack your faith – v. 18.

18 Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and began questioning Him, saying,

So far every group that tried to trap Jesus went down in flames. Now the Sadducees step forward. They're going to wish they hadn't! This is the only time they are mentioned in Mark. They were not a large group, but they were distinguished by their birth, wealth, education, and high positions in the Sanhedrin and in the leadership of the temple. They rejected all the traditions that the Pharisees held to, but they did hold to the first five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, as authoritative.

They denied the resurrection of the body; they believed the soul and body just ended at death – they were annihilationists. They had no eternal hope – they were "Sad, you see." They denied future judgment. They denied the existence of angels. Pretty much nobody liked them, but they had money and power. And they did not like this country bumpkin from Galilee coming along and challenging their authority. So now they are going to bring a question to Him that they think is going to torpedo His whole cause. They're going to question him about the resurrection.

Whether it's the resurrection or any other biblical doctrine, we need to be prepared for all kinds of questions that attack our faith. You've already met people who question your faith in creation. "You don't really believe God created the world in six literal days, do you? Do you seriously believe the whole world was inundated by a flood? Local I can believe, but worldwide?" Questions are flying our way about the Bible and gender issues. "Are people born gay? Did God make me a girl in a boy's body? What does the Bible say about gay marriage? What about abortion? Does God want people to suffer with some severe birth defects? What does the Bible say about unwanted pregnancies? Do you really believe Jonah was swallowed by a whale?"

So here are these Sadducees, questioning Christ about the resurrection. And really, it does push your head when you think about all these billions of humans throughout history who were conceived, lived, and died, and their bodies decompose back to dust. The silence of history on this planet is haunting. Do you really believe all these billions of souls are actually still alive somewhere and at some point God will unite their souls back to their resurrected bodies to actually stand before Him and then go on living forever in one of two places, heaven or the lake of fire? What a doctrine! How will this happen? There's mystery here. Like that great theologian from Mayberry Barney Fife declared, "We don't understand everything, Andy. There's plenty going on right now in the Twilight Zone that we don't know anything about and I think we ought to stay clear!" These Sadducees should have taken Barney's counsel and stayed clear!

So, be ready for questions! 1 Peter 3:15 says we need to be ready to give an answer to people who ask us about our faith.

Opponents of Christianity will try to ridicule your faith – vv. 19-23

19 "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES and leaves behind a wife AND LEAVES NO CHILD, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. 20 "There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children. 21 "The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; 22 and so all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also. 23 "In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her."

This whole thing reminds me of the Scopes monkey trial in Dayton, TN, when the shrewd lawyer Clarence Darrow tried to make William Jennings Bryan look like a Neanderthal. Bill Nye the science guy tried to do something similar with Ken Hamm, "Don't be teaching your children these myths about a six day creation when science has proven evolution!" So here they come, dripping with sarcasm, "Teacher...." Their whole goal here is to reduce Jesus to an idiot. And they use an absurd case to try to do it.

Basically they are referring to Deuteronomy 25:5-6, which taught the levirate law. God did say if brothers live together on their property and one marries a lady and he dies, the woman is responsible to marry her brother-in-law. This would keep the family name and inheritance intact. Levirate comes from the Latin word for brother-in-law, "levir."

So there you have their case! I've heard of seven brides for seven brothers, but never one bride for seven brothers, except here. It could happen, but very unlikely. So in verse 23 they bring their ultimate weapon in attempting to reduce their enemy and back him into a corner with nowhere to go. "In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" Snicker, snicker.

This is exactly what opponents of Christianity love to do. They try to lampoon our faith and make us look ridiculous in this scientifically advanced age, as in "So you believe the Bible, right? OK, where did Cain get his wife?" I came up with that years ago while attending community college. I thought I had sunk the entire Christian enterprise with that "brilliant" question. I was trying to be an atheist in those days.

So they have what they believe is their ultimate attack about the afterlife and the resurrection. By the way, there have been bizarre ideas about the afterlife. Egyptians loaded their burial place with a canoe and lots of food and other helpful stuff, sometimes even with living servants to help them on their great journey that lies ahead. Mormons believe there are three levels, the celestial, the terrestrial, and the telestial. If your marriage is sealed in a temple, in the resurrection you and your family may be able to create your own worlds and populate them with eternal posterity. Islam says for good Moslems there's a paradise just for you with rivers of water and wine and gold watches and all kinds of carnal pleasures, including lovely soft-eyed lasses. Men get plenty of ladies, but ladies only get one man, and she'll be satisfied with him.

But these Sadducees completely reject any existence after death. Let's see how Christ answers them.

Don't panic. Take your stand on the Bible alone – v. 24

24 Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?"

Jesus may be thinking, "Is this the best you've got?" They have just set themselves up for a huge bloody nose! First, fellas, you are mistaken. Those Sadduceean smirks just vanished into thin air! "You are way off base" – mistaken is the Greek word *planeo*, to wander around aimlessly. Basically, "You don't know what you are talking about!" One neat thing about Jesus, He never has to say, "Whoa, wait a minute. You've got Me there. Give me some time to think about that! I'll get back with you." No, He never says anything stupid and His facts always check! He is inspiring! Don't you want to be right there listening in to this conversation?

So, as they are reeling under the charge of being mistaken, He follows with two powerful accusations – write these down.

First, "You don't understand the Scriptures!" There you go! This is the biggest problem behind every false teaching, actually with every unbeliever. Whether it's rejecting creation or justification by faith alone or marriage – you don't understand the Scripture! As we'll see, the Scripture clearly teaches the resurrection of the body.

Second, "You don't understand the power of God!" Woohoo! Let's sink into that. You don't understand what God is able to do! He is a great and mighty God! By His word the heavens were made, and by His breath all their hosts! He knows every one of your forefathers. None escape Him. He hasn't lost track of any! He is able to gather your body and unite your soul to it and make you stand on earth again after you've turned to dust over 1000s of years! They did not understand the power of God! What about you? Do you understand the power of God? I don't, not enough! He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think!

Jesus goes straight to the Word! That's exactly what you and I need to do, always! There are all kinds of weird teachings flying around right now about Jesus' return and the end of the world. What does the Bible really say? Beware of those books that reveal secrets in the Bible no one has seen for 100s of years! I call them whiz-bang books. What does the Bible say about dying and going to heaven for 90 minutes and then coming back? Paul did it but couldn't talk about it. And he didn't make a truckload of money from it either! What saith the Scripture? This is why we need to be in the Word. Have you picked up a reading schedule? It's in your bulletin. We need to be hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, meditating, and applying God's Word – marinating your heart in the Word of God!

Christ always has the answer to every attack on your faith – vv. 25-27

25 "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 26 "But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning 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 the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."

Here they are, the educated professionals and rulers of God's people, and He charges them with ignorance of the Bible and God's power! He punches a big hole in their divinity degrees.

First, where did you get this idea people marry in heaven? You won't marry in heaven. If you want to get married, get married here, now! Don't wait for an angel to marry, it won't happen! Marriage is for companionship and reproducing, and in heaven you won't reproduce. When you die, your chances of marrying are over. Plus, we'll be like angels in that we won't die. Luke 20:35 says that. And notice, we'll be like angels; we won't be angels.

What will we do there in heaven? You will love it! Imagine the most exquisite human joys, stuff that makes your hair stand on edge. Your team intercepts a pass into the end zone and runs it back 110 yards to clench the Super Bowl (go Eagles), and you forget everything; you are filled with such outside of yourself

joy! Heaven will be something like that, only a million times better! These kinds of exquisite human experiences give us a little taste of what Psalm 16:11 means when it says, "In your presence is fullness of joy, and at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore!"

Second, Christ takes these guys straight to that part of the Bible they claim to believe, Exodus 3:5-6. He proves the resurrection by assuring them God didn't make His everlasting covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, just to leave them dead in the grave. Jesus reaches back for just the right passage and enforces it on these guys! Not only is God the living God, but God is the living God of living souls! One commentator said, "With the force of this argument the multitude was astonished and the Sadducees silenced."

Notice how Jesus ends this – "You are greatly mistaken!" Not just mistaken, but greatly mistaken. "You are engaged in a fatal error!" That could be written over the doors of many seminaries and churches and liberal universities who deny the truth of the Bible and reject the whole idea of salvation and the resurrection. You are greatly mistaken! You are completely derailed from truth! And you are teaching others your mistakes!

One of the saddest realities is that so many people think that when you die, that's it. As significant as life seems, bringing children into the world, all the beauty of creation, the sweetness of spirit, all the hopes for the future, to face the future thinking it all ends with your last heart beat is completely unacceptable. Surely there is more! God has put eternity in their hearts! You've got 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 where Paul reveals to us a mystery, "We won't all die but we will all be changed, instantly!" And Philippians 3:21, "Our dying bodies will be changed to immortal bodies, just like His glorious body!" We believe in the resurrection of the body!

So What?

Do you understand the Scriptures and the power of God? Do you believe whatever God has said He has the power to do, including raising you from the dead? Do you believe in the power of the gospel to save? Examine your own heart. You do not want Jesus to say to you, "You are greatly mistaken."