

## Controversies with the King (Part II)

Mark 12:18-34

When Joshua came into our family about 6 years ago, he would pick up phrases and concepts from his siblings. Which wasn't a great idea since his Siblings were recently adopted from Ukraine! And the Ukrainians were learning their English from people from Mississippi! We would say, "Joshua, be careful who you learn from!"

We too need to be careful whom we listen to about particular matters, especially matters related to God, salvation, and the afterlife.

A recent study suggests that **80% of Americans believe in the afterlife.** But on what are they basing their view of it? Movies? Songs? Popular literature about someone's experience?

### Heaven

#### 1. Popular ideas passed down:

- Endless sing-along
- Sitting in rows being taught
- Ethereal realm of disembodied spirits
- Cartoon: Sitting on a cloud in a diaper playing a harp.

#### 2. Movies have no shortage of references about heaven:

- Field of Dreams: "Is this heaven? No it's Iowa."

#### 3. Songs are filled with references to heaven

- Hank Jr: "If heaven ain't a lot like Dixie, then I don't want to go...."
- Bob Dylan/Guns N' Roses: "Knocking on Heaven's Door"
- Eric Clapton: "Would you know my name if I saw you in heaven? Would you be the same if I saw you in heaven?"
- Billy Ray Cyrus, "Redneck Heaven" in which he envisions seeing Conway Twitty, Hank, Elvis, and more.

### How can you go to heaven?

#### Popular ideas:

- (1) Be moral

- (2) Be sincere
- (3) Accomplish some great feat
- (3) Be better than the evil people of the world
- (4) Just die – Some assume God will say, “Oh, y’all come on in”

We need to hear from the Savior on these matters...

Jesus has all authority, and superior wisdom to speak on these things.

### Context: Honor Challenges

- This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> controversy, or “Honor challenges.”
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> comes from the Sadducees, and the 4<sup>th</sup> from a Scribe. The 3<sup>rd</sup> comes in order to humiliate Jesus, but the Scribe, as we shall see, has a different attitude.

### #1: The Question about the Resurrection by the Sadducees (18-27)

#### Sadducees:

- They were the wealthy aristocrats w/ significant **political & temple influence**. They basically vanished from history when the temple was destroyed in AD 70.
  - They were very **sympathetic to the Romans**.
  - They spoke with **condescension** and **sarcasm**.
  - This is the only time Jesus has an exclusive meeting in Mark.
- V 18:** Theologically, they **did not believe in the immortality of the soul or the resurrection**. That’s why they were, “**Sad, you see!**”
- They affirmed annihilation after death. You become plant food.
  - They only accepted the Torah, and claimed that Torah didn’t include anything on the resurrection, angels or the afterlife.
  - Acts 23:8: they denied the existence of angels and spirits.

#### A. The Question (19-23)

**Akin:** “If you want to build a big crowd, teach on sex or teach on the end times. And if you want to build a really big crowd, teach on sex in the end times!”

I ask my bride, “Will we be married in heaven?” She said, “Well, we will; I don’t know about everyone else.” That’s sweet. But is that true?

(Soon after she said, “When we get home, let’s strip down and ... do laundry.” Laundry? Is that code? It’s just us having this conversation. You don’t have to use code.... She meant laundry.... Will we be doing laundry with our spouses in heaven?”)

“The Sadducees created what we call a **reductio ad absurdum** argument, reducing things to the absurd or the ridiculous.” (Akin)

Behind this question was the custom of the **Levirate marriage** (comes from Latin, meaning brother-in-law).

- If a man’s brother died, he was to marry the widow to keep the family line in tact and to preserve family property (**Deut. 25:5-6**). Boaz performed a Levirate marriage when Ruth’s husband died, and the next of kin was unable to marry her.

The Sadducees may have borrowed their **bizarre scenario** from a story told in **Tobit**, an apocryphal book, which tells of a woman who married seven times **only to have each husband die by being strangled by a demon in the bed chamber on the wedding night** (Steven King would be proud of that!).

**The Logic/Point:** Look at how many problems the resurrection would cause! Since it’s absurd for a lady to be married to a seven husbands at once, and since heaven is an extension of this life, then the resurrection can’t be true. **The implications are absurd!**

**B. Jesus’ General Answer (24) – Jesus says you are (quite) wrong (24, 27) because (1) you’re ignorant of the Scriptures and; (2) you don’t believe in the power of God!**

How’s that for a response! I chuckle when I read it. These guys come up with their pomp and elitism, looking at Jesus like some country bumpkin, and Jesus says, “You guys don’t know jack!”

My guess is, this was the best argument the Sadducees had. They had probably already tried it out on the Pharisees already.

**i. On the Specific Issue of Marriage (25) – Grasp the Power of God**

This verse has caused many Bible readers much consternation (or **constipation**)

It's difficult because the Bible actually does not give us exact details about everything related to heaven. We know the big stuff:

- We will have glorified bodies
- We will no longer sin or suffer
- God will satisfy us with his presence forever
- We will worship and serve God forever
- We will be with a multitude of believers
- There will be a new heaven, and new earth.

But what about earthly relationships, particularly marriage?

- Some see Jesus' answer as **a disappointment**.
- **Some argue that Jesus simply meant that there wouldn't be any additional marriages in heaven, or any more Levirate marriages.**
  - While we must tread lightly, I think Jesus is saying something more than that; namely, that **our relationships in heaven will be transformed**. But not that your earthly marriage to a believing spouse will be irrelevant in heaven.
  - We will continue to enjoy our earthly relationships with believers in heaven but the exact nature of those relationships will be transformed in some ways.

Why? **Because the resurrected life is more than a mere continuation of this life.**

- The resurrected life is different from the world we live in!
- There will be some continuity (we will be ourselves), but there's also discontinuity!

The **Pharisees** taught that the afterlife was kind of a **2.0 version of this life, just an slightly upgraded version of this world**.

Not so! There will be a **"new heaven and new earth"** (Rev 21:1), for the "first heaven and first earth will pass away"

The resurrected life is not a prolonged earthly life but life in **an entirely new dimension (1 Cor 15:40–44)**

**So Jesus says:**

(1) **There will be a resurrection (25a)**. He's already predicted his resurrection three times!

(2) **There will be no marriage relationship exactly as we know it in this life (25b)**

(3) **We will become “like angels.”**

**What does this mean?**

- It doesn't mean we will be like cartoon characters.
  - “Abraham, Isaac, Jacob” ... are recognizable.
  - Jesus was recognizable though glorified after the resurrection, so will we be.
- It doesn't mean we “become angels.”
  - No we are different from angels.
- It means we will no longer marry
- It means we will no longer procreate
- It means we will never die.
- It means we will be in glorious harmony with God.
- It means we will have no feeling of discontentment or disappointment

**A Bit More on Marriage**

Marriage on earth is for these reasons: (1) Companionship, (2) Procreation, (3) Sexual Fulfillment; (4) an illustration of the gospel.

And in the resurrected life, these first three needs are fully met, and the fourth purpose will be fulfilled in heaven.

Marriage is beautiful. It is ordained by God but it is a **temporary institution**.

- There will be **no more reproduction** (neither *will they* marry).
- The **need for marital companionship will change**.
  - **There will be no lonely people in heaven! (Mk 10:30)**
- **God will satisfy us with Himself forever**.
  - Even the pleasure of sex will not be something we long for.

No one will be disappointed in heaven!  
No one will say, “I wish I was married!”  
No one will say, “I wish ... for anything!”

Thinking about your greatest longings right now: for kids, for companionship, for sex – all gone. All your longings will be fulfilled.

Our thinking about heaven is too small.

Our small-minded thinking about it reveals we aren't adequately considering the power of God!

God will blow your mind! The half hasn't been told!

J.E.: “[In heaven] the glorified spiritual bodies of the saints shall be filled with pleasures of the most exquisite kind that such refined bodies are capable of.”

Jesus says to us, “You ain't seen nothing yet!”

There's an entirely new dimension of life coming to believers. “We can no more imagine heavenly existence than an infant *in utero* can imagine a Beethoven piano concerto or the Grand Canyon at Sunset.” (James Edwards).

Jesus says your vision of heaven is too earthly.

### Qualifiers

- It does not mean you won't know and relate to your loved ones.
- It does not mean that there will be less of an ability to love – there will be more!
- Jonathan Edwards said heaven will be a “world of love.”
- We will be ourselves, our ultimate best, and we will be more lovable and more capable of love than ever.
- But marriage, as we know it, will cease to exist.

**Most of all: In heaven Jesus will be the Groom and we will be the Bride. That great purpose of marriage will be fulfilled.**

There will be one big marriage!

Therefore, understand that **heaven is not primarily about reunion with your loved ones** – though there will be a reunion.

**It's about something even greater!** It's ultimately about the glory of Jesus Christ – who will satisfy our deepest longings forever.

Single People: I don't want to dampen your desire to marry, but this glimpse into the future should encourage you! If you are disappointed, let this glimpse into the future remind you that marriage in this life is not the end all.

How does all of this happen?

**The power of God!** He will make all things new!

The Sadducees couldn't grasp God's power.

ii. **On the Specific Issue of OT Saints (26-27) – Know the Word of God**

Here Jesus speaks of **the FACT of the resurrection.**

To be clear, these saints haven't been raised bodily yet – they will. But they are currently with their God.

**God does not cease being God of his people when they die!**

He continues to be their God. He's the God of the living.

Jesus makes this point from part of the **Bible** they accepted! (Ex 3:6).

- His people never die!
- “Many will come from east and west and recline with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob” (Mt. 8:11)

Some argue that Jesus is saying “I am” not “I was” but the verb is actually not there, so that's not a great argument.

It's better just to see the obvious: These men enjoyed the **covenant promises of God**, which was an *everlasting* covenant.

Heb 11: These saints knew eternal promises during their earthly life. **"They were longing for a better country"**

**By God's grace, God enters an eternal covenant with his people; and it's by God's power that He keeps this eternal covenant with his people.**

Eternal life really begins the moment you are born again.

The big question is not: "Will there be sex in heaven, or marriage in heaven, but it is: **Will you be in heaven?"**

Look to Jesus alone for this, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

So he concludes, "You are quite wrong." You are wrong (v. 24,) then you are quite wrong (27).

**Application:**

Jesus believed that one's theology could be *wrong!*

He didn't say, "Oh, we're all right." Or "This stuff doesn't matter."

You can be really wrong about the world/theology/salvation.

**Theology and life goes wrong when you don't (1) Know and submit to the Scriptures and when (2) you doubt God's power.**

The Sadducees aren't the only ones who have a deficient view of Scripture and the power of God. So let's take heed.

**1. Authority. Study and Submit to the Scriptures.**

Don't put anything over the authority of the Scriptures (Parents, science, your feelings, etc).



Pop Culture more than most of these informs the way many look at the world more than the Bible (especially the younger generation). For example, consider 3 songs by 3 women (ht: Fred Sanders' article 2014):

- Katy Perry – “Firework”
- Lady Gaga – “Born this Way”
- Pink – “Raise Your Glass”

The style of the day is “relentless affirmation.” No one can correct you. And these are some of the priestesses of this new religion of self-affirmation.

### Reoccurring theme: You are awesome!

- You are perfect just the way you are.
- Don't let anyone tell you what to become in this life.
- There's some truth in this. You are made in the image of God. That's special.
- But there's been a fall. There's sin. You need to repent and align yourself with the King.
- It's the fallacy of “is equals ought.” If this is the way I am, then this is how I ought to live.
- But not if you embrace the Bible. It has authority. Your “is” is messed up! So is mine. We need to be changed.

### 2. Belief. Don't doubt the power of God.

- “Some have an appearance of godliness but they deny its power.” (2 Tim 3:5).
- God created the world; split the Red Sea; He raised Christ from the dead. Don't doubt his power.
  - a. Do you believe that someone who is attracted to the same sex might by God's power be able to change? Or to remain celibate for a lifetime? I raise this question because the debate about homosexuality is a debate about these two concepts: (1) the authority of Scripture, and (2) the power of God. Is Scripture the authority? Can God change people?
  - b. Do you really believe God can convert people?
  - c. DO you believe God answers prayer?

**We need to be a church with a Big God and worn out Bibles!**

## #2: The Question about the Greatest Commandment by a Scribe (28-34)

This guy is distinctly different than the other religious teachers (Notice it's one guy, not a group). He actually receives a commendation by Jesus. His approach to Jesus is different, and Jesus answer is different.

Two questions:

1. What made him *near*?
2. Why was he not *in*?

### #1: What Made Him Near?

1. **He was not adversarial (28)**. Notice how he approaches Jesus. He admired Jesus' answers. We don't read of him trying to "trap" Jesus.
2. **His question was humble, sincere, and good (28-31)**. Many had this question. Various Rabbis had different answers. In the rabbinic tradition there were 613 questions in the Torah. So which is the greatest? Which has priority? Good question.

### Jesus' Answer (29-31)

- The first part was known to everyone; it's the Shema (Deut. 6:4). No surprise here. It was repeated by every pious Jew every morning and night.
- The second part was taken from **Leviticus 19:8**. This was also known by Jews, but this was the first time they had been fused together.

Edwards: "The combination of the two commandments has become a commonplace in subsequent Christianity, but it is important to realize the revolutionary achievement of Jesus' answer. **Although love of God and love of humanity were occasionally affirmed separately in Israel, there is no evidence that before Jesus they were ever combined.** It does

not appear that any rabbi before Jesus regarded love of God and neighbor as the center and sum of the law”<sup>1</sup>

- The first one informs and inspires the second.
- The second one isn't left to our imagination. We're taught how we are to love neighbor.

### 3. His response to Jesus was humble and courageous (32).

“You are right, Teacher.” That was a courageous thing to say in light of the fact that other Scribes were no doubt present.

- ### 4. His response was also discerning (32-34a).
- He actually expands on the answer by saying that to love God and neighbor is greater than burnt offerings. The moral exceeds the ceremonial. There would have been burnt offerings in the background, a unique role of the temple. Then notice that Mark says, “Jesus saw that he answered wisely.”

This guy basically agrees with Jesus.

**V 34:** So Jesus says, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”  
What? Why wasn't he in?

This was a compliment ... but it was also a warning. It was intended to shock this man!

He's near, but He's not in. – Like John Wesley, religious, pious, seeking, but not converted.

## #2: Why Was He Not In?

He had theological clarification but failed to perceive his personal obligation.

Salvation involves more than agreement with Jesus; you must personally submit your life to this King.

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<sup>1</sup> Edwards, J. R. (2002). *The Gospel according to Mark* (p. 372). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

Theological agreement is **not sufficient.**

To love God and neighbor was the correct answer, but the Scribe has failed to see his own sinfulness and guilt.

- He **had not loved God and neighbor totally!**

You need more than to agree with Jesus!

- You need to see your **need for a Savior!**

You need a new heart!

This Scribe should have felt **the weight of this command.**

His response **should have been** something like:

- **“Woe is me!”** Not, you are correct!
- **“What a wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death!”**
- He should have **repented and turned to the Savior.**

God demands perfect love of God – with all we have! Notice the **“alls”**  
God demands that we love our neighbor as ourselves!

This command **was not** being practiced in the **temple!**

Business was booming in the temple; but not perfect love for God and neighbor!

There's **only one who perfectly loved God and neighbor.**

**And in just a few days his love for God and neighbor will be on full display at the cross!**

## **Summary**

Jesus has declared that everything is insufficient for entering the kingdom:

- Morality is insufficient – you aren't perfect.
- Sincerity is insufficient
- The temple is insufficient – it was a shadow

- Theological agreement without personal repentance is insufficient
- The law is insufficient

Who/What is sufficient?

**Jesus is sufficient! Only the Son of God – only the King – can get you into the Kingdom.**

He lived the life we couldn't live (loving God and neighbor perfectly) and died the death we should have died (for breaking God's law).

Now, all who turn from their sins and trust in this Savior can have everlasting life.

**34b:** The final sentence points to this atoning death: “No one dared to ask him any more questions.”

How does this point to the cross?

All of the religious leaders attempt to humiliate and trap Jesus have failed. **Plan A has failed.** They must look for a plan B, which they will find with the betrayal of Judas. They can't trap him; so they will kill him.

One scholar notes, “The stage is now set for the final act.”

Yes. The stage is set for the final act.

## 2 Concluding Words of Hope:

### **1. Hope for Sinful People**

- These passages show us the Savior's love for sinners.
- It shows his power over the grave.
- There's only one who kept the law perfectly.
- You can be in the kingdom by repenting of sin and looking to Jesus, the one who would die in just a few more days, and then rise again for our justification.

### **2. Hope for Suffering People.**

**There is an afterlife! We will be with God. There will be a resurrection!**

Jesus has another answer for the Sadducees just a few days later – an **empty tomb!**

The next life will be **better than anything we've ever imagined!**

The resurrection gives hope to the **suffering missionary** (remember Mark's first audience – the Roman Christians); the person afflicted with **cancer**; the **lonely widow**; and more... Jesus will wipe away our tears and all things will become new!

People who submit to God's Word, and believe in His Power have every reason to look at this world with **gospel optimism**, not like the sky is fallen.

- Jesus Christ will reign.
- We will be with Him.
- All things will be made new.
- He will satisfy our deepest longings forever.
- That hope is for all who know him!

Who you listen to matters. Who you follow matters.

Listen to Jesus on the matters of life after death – He who has all authority and superior wisdom than anyone – and He who has conquered the grave.