

Marriage at the resurrection Mark 12:18-27 ¹⁸ Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ¹⁹ '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. ²⁰ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. ²¹ The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. ²² In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. ²³ At the resurrection^[d] whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?' ²⁴ Jesus replied, 'Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? ²⁵ When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 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"^[d]? ²⁷ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!'

Last week we saw how the Herodians and Pharisees tried to trap Jesus with a very sneaky question: "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" hoping that whatever answer was given would upset either the Romans or the Jews. As ever we see the teachers of the law, the Scribes, the Pharisees and the chief priests all trying to trap Jesus by asking questions they knew were hard to answer. This time the Sadducees are mentioned for the first time. The Sadducees were a smaller group of Levites – the tribe from which the priesthood was taken – and a few others from other tribes who formed the ruling class in Judea. They didn't take much notice of the Scriptures other than the first five books believed to be written by Moses. In fact they didn't believe in the afterlife, neither heaven nor hell, angels or spirits. They thought once you're dead, that's it: a bit like many today! The unseen spirit world, the unseen heaven, the later writings and the prophets were not part of their worldview. They didn't believe in immortality. Nearly everyone in the world believed until the last few centuries that men have souls and that these souls live on after death somewhere. The Sadducees were different. They denied the divine power of God to keep our souls alive after death. A very modern, almost atheist position. They felt themselves superior to the other sects – they considered the Pharisees to be lower class – far too earnest in their observances with too many traditions, many of which existed to find loopholes in the Law of Moses. They also considered the rest of the Scriptures as unimportant – the Law of Moses was sufficient for them, so they more or less dismissed everything from Joshua and Judges onwards, the prophets, the psalms, the histories of the kings of Israel and Judah, and the apocryphal books. The Sadducees had a position in society as Levites and in theory had the right to be supported by the tithes from which the other eleven tribes. In other words, they needn't do any work other than their temple duties, though in practice they owned land they could have farmed themselves or rented out.

Being too clever by half, they approached Jesus with a question that ridiculed what would happen in heaven if it existed. Their question was insulting, almost a joke question, and being so clever, they thought they would make Jesus look ridiculous as well as any listeners who did believe in the resurrection of the dead (pretty much every other Jewish sect and everyone else on the planet with some kind of religious belief). They start mockingly, calling Jesus "Teacher" in the certainty that they knew the Law better than He did, despite all evidence to the contrary so far when others questioned Jesus and came away unable to point out any error in His teaching.

The Law demanded that when a married man died childless, his widow had to marry his brother and the child from that union would inherit the dead husband's property. This is in Deuteronomy 25:5-10

⁵ If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfil the duty of a brother-in-law to her. ⁶ The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. ⁷ However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfil the duty of a brother-in-law to me.' ⁸ Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, 'I do not want to marry her,' ⁹ his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, 'This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line.' ¹⁰ That man's line shall be known in Israel as *The Family of the Unsandalled*.

If you know your Bible, this what happened in the Book of Ruth, where Boaz asks the kinsman who is entitled to take Ruth, the widow of a dead husband whose brother had also died if he was willing. As he wasn't, Boaz was the next nearest relative of Ruth's dead husband, and he took her as his wife, and she (a Moabite woman) was the great

grandmother of King David. Boaz's mother was Rahab the harlot from Jericho who hid the spies sent by Joshua, and was saved after the wall came tumbling down. Just five generations from entering the promised land to King David.

The seven brothers all died childless and then in heaven, the Sadducees asked, whose wife was she as she had married all seven of them? Jesus insults their intelligence by saying they do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God. Firstly by ignoring the Scriptures other than the first five books of Moses, they had limited their knowledge of what God had done. Jesus tells the Sadducees that when the dead rise they will neither marry nor be given in marriage but be like the angels in heaven – in other words they will share the immortal nature of angels. In Luke 20:34-40 the same story is mentioned. There Jesus says the dead are the sons (children) of God, being sons (children in the NIV) of the resurrection.

Luke 20 ³⁴ Jesus replied, 'The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵ But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶ and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. ³⁷ But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". ³⁸ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.' ³⁹ Some of the teachers of the law responded, 'Well said, teacher!' ⁴⁰ And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Secondly Jesus takes issue with the Sadducees understanding of heaven – they made it a place where the earthly laws apply while Jesus says it isn't like that. He hits the Sadducees with a quote from Exodus 3 telling them that Moses believed the dead are alive because God in the burning bush said He was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Why would God be using the present tense as if they were still alive if they were dead? God appeared to talk about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as if they were still alive. If these three patriarchs are deemed by God to be alive, the resurrection of the dead is proved. God's love for these three endures for ever. The Sadducees quoted from the books of Moses and Jesus answers them using the second book of Moses, Exodus. All Jews accepted the first five books of Moses as authoritative. As a final dig at their ridiculous question, Jesus tells these clever men "you are badly mistaken." And none could counter his point. In Luke's Gospel some listeners respond with "well said Teacher". Grudging admiration from some of the teachers of the Law, who no doubt enjoyed seeing the Sadducees bested this time, instead of themselves.

Psalm 73: 23-25 ²³ Yet I am always with you; You hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with Your counsel, and afterwards You will take me into glory. If there were no life after death, how could God take us into glory?

Job 19 ²⁵ I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; ²⁷ I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Isaiah 26 ¹⁹ But your dead will live, LORD; their bodies will rise – let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy – your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.

Daniel 12 ² Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

John 11 ²¹ 'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.' ²³ Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' ²⁴ Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' ²⁵ Jesus said to her, '**I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?**'