

When Minds are Made Up

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[0 : 00] of the gospel of Mark chapter 12. Verse 18, once again, it's a short passage.

I'll read the whole thing. Page 1023, Mark 12 and verse 18. The Sadducees came to Jesus who say, there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question saying, teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.

There were seven brothers. The first took a wife and when he died, left no offspring. And the second took her and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. And the seven left no offspring.

Last of all, the woman also died. In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as a wife. Jesus said to them, is this not the reason you are wrong because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God.

For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. For as the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him saying, I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

[1 : 21] He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong. If there's one thing that's more humiliating than being wrong, it's being told that you are wrong.

It's one thing to make a mistake in private. It's another thing to being named and shamed for your mistake. And that's exactly what the Sadducees are discovering in their attempt to trip Jesus up and to discredit what they disbelieved in, which was the resurrection of the dead.

Now, being wrong can be trivial. Sometimes, I suppose, we're often wrong. But most things, when we go astray, we can put right.

Trivialities can always be mended and repaired and put right in some way. But I'm quite sure that you're aware also that sometimes when we go wrong, it can have tragic consequences.

And it is when we go wrong in important places that when someone tells us that we are wrong, then it's like something that is very welcome indeed.

[3 : 01] If you are out hill walking and you discover that you're lost, if you meet somebody and that person tells you you've taken the wrong road, you need to go back, then you give that person a hug because they probably saved your life.

That's how important it is. You don't mind the humiliation, at least I hope you wouldn't mind the humiliation of being told that you've taken the wrong road because it saves your life.

And being humiliated is nothing to losing your life. Well, these Sadducees were not prepared to be humiliated and they were wrong.

You would think that with a question like whether you believed in the resurrection or not, it was such a crucial, singularly important issue that they would come to Jesus with an open mind and that they would ask him for what he believed or what he taught rather about the resurrection.

You would think that they would ask him something like, tell us something about the resurrection, tell us about the kingdom of God. This is such an important issue. You would think that they would come like the man who came to Jesus and said, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?

[4 : 15] But the Sadducees had made up their minds beforehand that they just did not believe in the resurrection. It's one thing to ask a question. It's good to ask a question.

I'm sure that many of us here tonight come with many questions about the Christian faith. It is through asking these questions and exploring the Christian faith that we come to the right conclusion by searching the Bible.

But if you're coming with your mind made up, then it's actually a bit of a waste of time coming with the questions because what you're really saying is you're turning your question into a pointless argument.

And it doesn't matter how the person answers your question. If your mind is already made up, then it's a waste of time. You would imagine that the Sadducees then, who didn't believe, who were the Sadducees?

Well, they were part of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish ruling council at that time. They had a lot of power and authority, as we see, when Jesus was arrested and when he was taken to the high priest, it was before the Sanhedrin that he came before going to Pilate.

[5 : 31] It was Pilate that eventually condemned Jesus, but the first people to try him was the Sanhedrin. And they were made up of Sadducees and Pharisees and scribes.

And the main parties were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And they didn't always agree with each other. In fact, they fell out quite badly over a number of very important issues.

For example, the Pharisees believed in angels and demons, but the Sadducees refused to believe in angels and demons. And they also refused to believe in the resurrection.

They believed that at death, that your body and your soul went out of existence. It perished. But the Pharisees, especially by the time of Jesus coming, they had come to grow in their understanding of the resurrection, as did the majority of Jewish people at that time.

Although the references to the resurrection in the Old Testament are unclear, yet the Pharisees believed growingly, increasingly in the resurrection, as did the majority of Jewish people at that time.

[6 : 44] But what's more, of course, the Sadducees had their own reputation to think about. And when your reputation is on the line, it does tend to get mixed up with your spiritual commitment, your religious commitment.

It still does. If you've got a certain reputation, if you've got your group of friends, your circle of friends, then when you come to think seriously about coming to faith in Jesus, it's going to impact your reputation amongst your friends.

And often, that's the very reason why people stop short of coming to faith in Jesus. Because, not because they disbelieve that Jesus is the Son of God, and not because they don't believe that He is the way to eternal life, but because of the impact that it was going to make on their lives.

And that's exactly the reason why the Jewish rulers refused to acknowledge Jesus, why they grew in their hatred of Him, and why they eventually condemned Him to death, because they thought that by so doing, they would preserve their own reputation.

They were always trying to win points with people, and trying to assert their own authority. Power corrupts. And it was like this with the Sadducees.

[7 : 59] They were upper class. They were elite. They were rich. They were wealthy. They looked down on other people. And you can get used to that if that's your position in life. And it's very, very difficult to shake somebody from that so-called superior position.

And furthermore, they collaborated with the Romans. So the Romans, they kind of gave them that position of power and authority over other people. As I say, the Sadducees believed that at death, the soul, your soul, and your body perished.

And there was no hopes of further rewards or punishments. And so, even like I say, that by that time, many of the Jews had come.

So, the Sadducees came to Jesus with this question. And the question was designed to discredit Jesus. It wasn't an open question at all. They didn't come with open hearts and open minds.

They came to try and prove their point to Jesus. Their minds were already made up. Here's the situation they put before him. Well, they said to Jesus, if there is such a thing as the resurrection, what about this scenario?

[9 : 13] What about a woman? And she's married to a man with six brothers. And her husband, her first husband, dies. So, she has to marry his brother.

And he dies. And she has to marry another brother. And he dies. And she has to marry another brother. And so, the whole thing goes on. And she marries the seven brothers in succession.

Number one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. And eventually, the seventh brother dies, her seventh husband, and then she dies also. The question is simple.

If there is such a thing as the resurrection, say the Sadducees, then whose wife will she be? Perhaps I should explain that what they were talking about is what we call leveret marriage or leveret marriage.

And they were talking about a practice, in fact, it was a law in the Old Testament in which if a wife was married to a husband and the husband died and there was no children or no son, then the brother of the husband was duty-bound to marry the widow in order to preserve his name and his honor.

[10 : 30] You can find the whole procedure in Deuteronomy 25. In fact, if on the death of the brother, the other brother refused to step in and marry the widow in order to preserve his honor, if he refused to do so, she could go to the elders of the city and they would have to go and try and persuade him to do his duty and marry the widow of his brother.

And if he still refused, she was to take him to the gate of the city which was a place where judgments were made. It was like the town hall in those days. And she was to forcibly remove his sandal and spit in his face and his house from then on would be called the house of the one who had his sandal pulled off.

If you don't believe me, then go back to Deuteronomy 25 and you read it all there. Such was the disgrace that was on a man who refused to marry his brother's widow in order to preserve the brother's name and his line in the up and coming generations.

Now, in of course their eagerness to deny the supernatural and to deny the resurrection, these Sadducees, they came to Jesus with this scenario and they say, here we have these seven brothers and they've all been married to this one woman.

Whose wife is she going to be if there's such a thing as the resurrection? Their minds were made up because of this scenario that they had invented, this kind of ridiculous scenario.

[12 : 09] Then they thought that they truly had tripped Jesus up. They had concluded and their minds were made up. It's a bit like the thinking in today's atheistic world and they accuse us as Christians of being intolerant but many atheists are just as intolerant as Christians.

Richard Dawkins in his book *The God Delusion* says this, he says, faith is blind trust in the absence of evidence even in the teeth of evidence.

Now that's really a tall order. Somebody like that is not asking questions at all. They're not coming with an open mind and if they are it's not to find out the truth.

It's too ridiculous what the Bible says. That's what the Sadducees were doing except that they were religious men. They were trying to set up a scenario that was so ridiculous that they thought they could walk away and clap their hands in glee and say, we've got him now.

It's the way that people try to discredit the Bible today by asking questions which are real questions but they're not asking them as questions at all. They're asking them because they feel that this is the key issue on which the Bible stands or falls.

[13 : 23] Like for example, who was Cain's wife? You've heard people asking that question a million times. If the Bible is true then who was Cain's wife? Now that's a perfectly reasonable question as I guess it's a question that we've all asked but more often than not it's not asked with an open mind at all.

We don't want to know the answer you want to discredit and disprove the Bible. Ah, if there was such a person as Adam and Eve then how could it possibly be that so many people in the world could come from one family without Cain marrying someone who wasn't his sister?

It's a perfectly reasonable question but it's said it's asked more often than not in a hostile manner. An atheist will tell you that the resurrection is not impossible.

A person who's an atheist who's a true scientist will say well actually nothing is impossible as such. It's improbable. Scientists talk about things being improbable.

So someone like Richard Dawkins and I hope that I'm not misrepresenting him he will say well I'm not saying that it is impossible that the dead could rise but I'm saying that in the laws of average and statistics and probability it is so tiny that it is virtually impossible for that to be.

[14 : 43] It is improbable. Well, I find that fascinating when people talk in these terms because the lottery is improbable as well. What was it?

The mega millions this week scored? What was it? These people these Americans won \$640 million. Biggest ever scoop I think anywhere.

The mega millions. The newspaper was saying that it's 50 you're 50 times more likely to be hit by lightning than to win the mega millions lottery.

And yet the TV was showing the queues and queues of people queuing up hoping against hope to have a chance of winning this absolute fortune.

and they were saying that the poorest the very poorest were spending 9% of their income on that one chance. One seven six one chance and 176 million on winning the mega million lottery.

[15 : 55] And yet there were queues of people for something which is so improbable that it is negligible. you could pretty much say to somebody with absolute certainty you're not going to win you're wasting your time and yet because there is one chance and 176 then they're going to take that chance because they obviously think it's worth it.

It's the same in this country it's the same as any country it's not just every country it would be exactly the same here and it is exactly the same here. But when it comes to the resurrection Jesus has promised not only what is improbable but what is truly impossible I am quite happy tonight to admit that being raised from the dead is absolutely impossible it is physically and scientifically totally impossible that's what makes it so marvelous because I'm not interested in whether it's impossible or not I'm interested in whether it's true and I know it's true because Jesus himself rose from the dead physically and actually and historically the grave was empty the tomb was empty the angels said to the disciples he is not here he is risen come and see the place where he lay and the reason I believe in the resurrection today is not because of its statistical average probability it is because

Jesus has told me that I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me though he were dead yet shall he live and he who lives and believes in me will never die do you he said to Martha do you believe this and he says the same thing to us tonight do you believe this not on the strength of scientific probability or statistics but on the strength of my promise as the God of the universe the God who has given you your life in the first place and I have the authority to give it back to you when I choose and I have the authority to raise the dead and to open the graves and to come for my people to take them to be with myself so they shall forever be with the Lord and to create the new heavens and the new earth when my time comes and so tonight that's the challenge do you believe the impossible do you believe the resurrection because the resurrection can only be as a result of the power of God the miracle working power of God the God who brought this universe into existence by the word of his power is the same

God who can reconstitute our bodies he can do anything nothing is impossible with God so Jesus goes on then to explain the resurrected life and to give an answer to the questions that the Sadducees had given and in actual fact it fits in with what we've been thinking about over the past few weeks in our studies in the closing chapters of Revelation we've seen how God's ultimate purpose is to raise his people from being dead and bring them into his new recreated limitless perfect kingdom in a new dimension a new heaven and a new earth and one of the in that new world one of the natural questions which this passage raises for us is what place how like how similar to this life will it be and of course we naturally ask that question because we find huge difficulty in trying to imagine what another dimension would be like it's impossible for us we have to trust

God we have to trust him when he says that I will make all things new but naturally we want to we want there to be some link don't don't we with one and of course one of the most precious things to us and this are our relationships our family relationships our brothers our sisters our mothers our fathers our children our wives our husbands and we find it impossible to imagine what that life must be like without the enjoyment of the relationships that we have in this world so if you're married tonight you'll probably find great difficulty in thinking about God's new kingdom the new heaven and the new earth heaven as being a place but this is what Jesus tells us he tells us here that you know neither the scriptures for when they rise from the dead they neither marry nor are given in marriage there won't be any marriage in heaven that's plain from this scripture there won't be any need to there won't be any desire to it'll be a new beginning new relationship a new type of relationship and as we saw in chapter I think 18 19 the whole of heaven will be one great ultimate marriage between the church and between God's people and himself the ultimate conclusion to what marriage is all about in this world in any case it's a picture or supposed to be a picture of Jesus and his people now this raises some very interesting questions and I just want to spend one or two minutes just thinking about the kind of questions that arise out of what Jesus is saying in this passage he's not saying that singleness is superior to marriage or that marriage is superior to being single because if we read this wrong we think oh well God's ultimate purpose in heaven is for everyone to be single therefore in this world there must be something wrong with marriage it must be a kind of lesser state it must be a kind of a convenience or something that is not truly ultimately spiritual and of course you get some some people who have suggested over the years that there is a benefit a spiritual benefit a superiority in other words you get closer to God if you're single if you live the life and the more remote you are from the real world and from other people in the world the more you can cut yourself off from the real world then the more close to God you get and so therefore they come to the conclusion that the best thing to do is to take a vow and to go into a monastery or to a nunnery or whatever and to be single for the rest of your life and then people say well what about 1st

[22 : 58] Corinthians chapter chapter 7 the chapter that we read where Paul says I wish that all were as I myself am but each has his own gift from God one is one kind and one of another to the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am but if they cannot exercise self-control they should marry for it is better to marry than to burn with passion does this mean then the only reason that I want to get married is because I can't control myself it seems on the outside that that's what Paul is saying if that is the case then surely it is better for a person to work on his self-control to such a extent that he is able to maintain a state of singleness so that he is closer to the Lord and so that he's able to devote himself because Paul goes on to say that he goes on to say how much if you're single you're able to devote yourself to the kingdom of God and not have to worry about pleasing your wife or the same is true for your wife pleasing the husband well the answer I believe is found in verse 17 of that chapter we don't have any time to go into I would love to think about this chapter sometime with you it's full of the most fascinating themes and and the most it can very easily be misunderstood chapter 7 of first Corinthians but I believe the answer to this whole question is found in verse 17 where Paul says only let each person lead the life that God has assigned to him and to which

God has called him in Matthew chapter 19 Jesus talks about eunuchs and he's not talking about actual physical physiological eunuchs he's talking about himself he never married he never married but we're not to say that because Jesus never married that somehow or other a state of singleness is somehow purer than to be married the Bible doesn't say that anywhere but what Jesus says is this that it's a question of how God has providentially led us and I guess that's true for all of us in many different ways we are to recognize our lives at this moment in time as the place to which God has called us that doesn't mean it can't change but we are to recognize that we're not here tonight because of something random we're here tonight because God has called us into the position that we are in if it's singleness it's singleness if it's marriage it's marriage because somehow

God has in his own way in his own perfect plan he has taken us thus far and we are to recognize his sovereignty over our lives and we're to give thanks for it so Jesus when he reminds the Sadducees that there won't be any marriage in heaven he's not saying to us or anyone else the better state is not to be married he's simply saying that when the new age comes when the new heaven and the new earth will be revealed it will be a different order altogether in which there will be no more unique relationship that you have enjoyed in this world or that some of you have enjoyed in this world there won't be that anymore and that will apply to lots of areas in life will there be food will there be air can't think of life without breathing can you you can't think of life without feeding food it's not only something that we need it's something we enjoy there's all these questions in which God is saying trust me you won't complain you will be happier than you have ever ever been in this world

Jesus also goes on in the next phrase to talk about the angels in heaven and he says that they neither marry nor are given it but are like angels in heaven and again this raises a whole lot of really interesting questions it it reminds us of course of this an order of beings that is different from humanity created by God someone asked me recently are angels created in the image of God are angels made in the image of God and quite honestly I'm not entirely sure if I can answer that question there must be some features of angels in which they are able to reason in which they're able to love and worship and recognize and communicate with one another all of these are the image of God and yet we're not told that they were made in the image of God only humankind is made in the image of God that's what we're told in

Genesis chapter 1 and yet we recognize because the Bible is full of angels and angels didn't disappear in the book of Revelation angels we believe in the existence and the presence of angels and yet one thing we know about the angels is they do not reproduce they do not have there is no place amongst in the angel world for the unique relationship which is enjoyed by human beings between a man and a woman God specifically said in Genesis chapter 1 that he created human beings male and female he created them after the image of God so there is something in the complementary nature of male and female that reflects the image of God I'll leave that with you to work out your own understanding of that it's fascinating I find it the Bible is more and more fascinating the more you look at it but in the end with the angels there is no marriage and no no giving in marriage there's no reproduction there's no pregnancy there's no birth there's no need because all of the angels have been created uniquely by God and and they are eternal they don't die they're all there in their number and they won't that number won't change we believe unless God is creating more we don't know but we do know this that there is no marriage in amongst the angels now again taking another theme that rises out of this in

[29 : 45] Genesis chapter 6 there is a really really interesting passage way back before the flood when the world was degenerating because of sin and humankind was becoming worse and worse and worse and doing everything that lay within his imagination to do against God and what seemed to come natural to him was sin all the time and God repented that's what it tells us he was grieved that he made the earth and of course that's why he sent the flood but this is what it says it says that the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive and they took them as their wives as they any of the they choose and then it tells us in verse 4 that the Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also afterward when the sons of God came to the daughters of man and they bore children to them these were the mighty men who were of all the men of renown now some people read this passage and they say this ah this means that the sons of God angels they saw the daughters of man human female human beings and the sons of

God angels they took them and they were joined with them and they became united with them and they had children angels and humans a man angel and a woman human and the result was the Nephilim the Nephilim were supposed to be giants men of great renown and strength and they say to you well that's what happens when you get an angel as a father and a woman as a as a mother well to me that's what happens when you use too much imagination when you're reading the Bible the sons of God do not necessarily mean angels the sons of God are simply those who fell in the family of Zeth family of Zeth was the family of promise and what this passage means is that those who were supposed to know better and who knew the Lord they went astray because of their own sexual lust and they began to take wives for all the wrong reasons and things degenerated from there onwards and the world became so corrupt so perverse that God had no option but to punish the world by sending a flood a warning to each one of us that any one of us can go wrong and when we do go wrong very often we have an effect and an impact on the world around us whatever we do we do to the detriment and to the harm of the world around us and then of course finally Jesus goes on to the resurrection of the dead he wants to come on quickly he doesn't want to he wants to get to the heart of the problem which is the unbelief of the

Sadducees and he says let's not stop there in verse 26 he says as for the dead being raised you have you not read in the book of Moses in the passage about the bush how God spoke to him saying I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob he is not the God of the dead but he is the God of the living you are quite wrong the resurrection of the dead tonight is God's promise of everlasting life life beyond the grave it means that when a person dies their soul lives on and it also means that a day will come in the future we don't know when that will be the last day the day of judgment when Jesus will come again and when he will by his own command raise his own people from the dead everyone will be raised from the dead the resurrection applies to everyone whether you've believed and trusted in Jesus or not but as soon as that resurrection takes place then there will be a great division as the parable of the virgins and the parable of the talents tells us a great division in which immediately God will separate those who follow Jesus from those who didn't as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats and on that day Jesus will say to those who have lived and died following him come you blessed of my father into eternal life enter into the joy of the

Lord you will say to those who haven't followed him depart from me into outer darkness why does it have to be like that well I'll tell you I'll tell you why everyone cannot be saved because there is only one way for a person to be rescued from sin and that is to have their sin forgiven there's only one thing that stands between us tonight and eternal life and that's our sin either of sin tonight is forgiven by our trusting in Jesus as our Savior or it's not and the Bible is clear about those who die in Jesus Christ trusting believing following Jesus Christ that Jesus will come for them one day and the graves will be opened and they will rise and go forever to be with the Lord that will be as real on that day as anything is tonight millions of people to over the next couple of weeks are going to be celebrating Easter for them it's a time it's like Christmas it's a time of great celebration a great joy but how many of them realize what exactly they are celebrating oh I wish they did I wish so much that they saw the reality of this time of year the reality of the empty tomb and what it means the message that is contained in that cave that empty cave that because he rose from the dead those who believe in him and trust in him will also be raised from the dead one day also and all I can say tonight in closing is that I truly hope I truly hope and pray and as we've looked at this fascinating passage in which the whole question of the dead being raised comes up again as it does all the way through the Bible through the New Testament and as once again we are being brought to that place where Jesus himself was raised from the dead and we are being promised and pointed to the day when Jesus himself will come and when the graves will be open I hope that as we're reminded of that reality that your trust your faith will be placed completely in Jesus Christ he's done it already that's the only reason tonight as I've tried to say in the newsletter that's the only reason I'm a Christian and it's the only reason why you should be a Christian as well Jesus is risen therefore there is a promise that God has made to all those who trust in him for the forgiveness of their sin let's pray together

Oooh Maybe we should pass him to our next day Maybe we should listen before talking Okay the reason why is he too is not good So we're here um a Christian back then it's really true Yeah The other one should be assumed to do How these can be good Where are you things like What about Avatar Mike How about hali How about before To follow Do What was There It's Everybody