

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM

Mark 12:18-27

Key Verse: 12:26b

"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

In the last passage the Pharisees came to Jesus and asked him, "Is it right to [pay taxes](#) to Caesar or not?" (14) This question was subtle enough to make anyone fall into a dilemma. The Israelites were occupied by the Roman Empire. They had to pay taxes to the Roman Empire as one of the colonial peoples. However, the people of Israel believed that they had to love God only. They were happy to pay [the Jewish](#) temple tax. But they were sorry about [paying taxes](#) to Rome, thinking it was illegal to pay the tax to the Roman Emperor, and thinking that they were a chosen people. Jesus said in verse 17, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." Jesus' answer taught them the basic duties to state and church. Christian faith is based on the fact that God's people must love God only. But Jesus answered them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's." The Sadducees heard that the Pharisees failed terribly in trapping Jesus. The Sadducees felt good, thinking they were superior to the Pharisees. In today's passage the Sadducees were more than sure they could trap Jesus with a very subtle question and put him in deep trouble. Let's see what their question was and how Jesus helped them to understand the spiritual world.

I. The motive of the Sadducees' denial of the resurrection (18-23)

According to Josephus the historian, the word "Sadducee" means "the righteous one." But in light of history, the Sadducees had never been "the righteous ones"; they were, in general, opportunists or sheer pragmatists. The origin of the Sadducees is obscure. Probably the Sadducees became a sect when the priesthood became increasingly powerful. At the time of Jesus, the people of Israel were suffering under the yoke of the Roman Empire. But the Sadducees were known as aristocrats. They were more interested in maintaining the status quo than in the religious purity of the nation. Simply speaking, they were not godly people, but were political people. For example, they did not believe in the resurrection of the body (18). They also did not believe in any spiritual realities, such as spirits, angels and the immortality of the soul. It is irony that the high priests' position had been occupied by atheistic Sadducees throughout many generations. It has been said, "The world is mad and full of ironies." This saying might have stemmed from the Sadducees. With the authority and power of the high priesthood, they abused their power over the suffering people.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection because they loved the world so much that they had no idea about the spiritual realities. They were ancient hedonists who loved the world and with money they wanted to live in the world forever. Moreover, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection in order to deny the Bible teaching, especially that everybody has to stand before the judgment seat of God after death (2Co 5:10). They really wanted to escape standing before the judgment seat of God. So they lived as if they were agnostics. As a result, they denied the resurrection of the body doggedly. They were

like little children who cover their eyes with their fingers and say, "There is no sky." Especially, the Sadducees did not like one of Jesus' titles, "The Son of David," which indicated the coming Messiah who would die for the sin of the world and rise again on the third day. They came to Jesus to discredit him in the eyes of the people and get him in trouble with the Roman power as to the authority of Jesus (Mt 21:23) and as to the resurrection of the body.

The Sadducees asked a question made up of a most sorrowful and grotesque story which goes as follows: "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 have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" (19-23) The Sadducees, in making up this story, made use of the Jewish levirate law of marriage. Deuteronomy 25:5-10 says, "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 fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. 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. 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 fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me.' 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,' 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.' That man's line shall be known in Israel as The Family of the Unsandaled." The story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis is a good example of Jewish tradition (Gen 38).

The gist of the Sadducees' question was, "At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven brothers were married to her?" The Sadducees thought that in asking such a question they had rendered the whole idea of the resurrection completely ridiculous. The Sadducees never believed in the resurrection. But they asked Jesus what would happen at the resurrection by saying, "At the resurrection whose wife will she be?" (23) They were indeed contradictory people.

The Sadducees' assumptive story is not acceptable. For instance, how can a woman, a human being, marry seven brothers unless she is made of steel? Even if she is made of steel, how could she change her emotional feelings like we change the cartridge of a printer, in order to marry seven times? The Sadducees never understood the integrity of a woman. Usually a woman marries one time. She never wants to marry again. In the Old Testament, the widow Ruth said to her mother-in-law, Naomi, "...if anything but death separates you and me" (Ru 1:17b). She is a good illustration of a genuine woman. When we analyze their story, the Sadducees were people who could do anything to carry out their political intrigue. Maybe this is the reason people say, "politicians are first-class liars."

The Sadducees talked about the marriage problem because it was in the first place of their hearts. The Sadducees were excessively obsessed with grabbing a woman of noble birth in their hands. This is why they asked, "Whose wife will she be?" They were always sick with the idea to grab something in their hands.

What is worse, the Sadducees had the problem of death in their hearts, even though they did not know what it was. They were aristocratic people. They enjoyed a luxurious life and their political power. So they wanted to live in this world forever and never die. But things did not go as they had expected. The Sadducees ignored the spiritual realities completely. But they could not be an exception from the absolute of God that man is both body and spirit. For example, the president of a company who possessed a 27-story building invited his pastor to dinner. After the dinner he asked his pastor a question, "Is it okay if I drink just one cup of wine before going to bed?" The president's wife, sitting next to him at the table, said sadly, "He wants to drink just one cup of wine, then just one more cup of wine and then one more cup of wine until he is drunken almost every night." This man's tragedy was that he did not know the simple truth that man is both body and spirit. He did not know the fact that he was under the power of sin and death. So every night demons held a carnival in the man's soul.

The experience of Cain was very familiar to the Sadducees. They knew God but they did not respect God. They did not obey God. When Cain felt good he bought a Big Mac for his younger brother, Abel. But when he felt bad he killed his brother by beating him to death. Still, God promised him that he would care for him. But Cain did not accept God's promise. Cain said to God, "My punishment is more than I can bear" (Ge 4:13). When Cain wanted to live in the world leaving God out, he had no direction. So he became a restless wanderer. He was going somewhere every day until he was completely exhausted. His life was full of constant sufferings and anxiety. Cain wanted to live freely, leaving God out of his life so that he might live freely in his own way. But he was not free. He was a restless wanderer.

There was a man called Zacchaeus. His official title was "A Chief Tax Collector of Jericho." He ate a lot. As a result, he weighed 244 pounds even though he was 4' 11". He did not need a chair because he was so roly-poly that his standing or sitting didn't make any difference. One day he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by Jericho. Since he was short, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus. Jesus saw that he was a lost soul. Jesus' compassionate heart went out to him. Jesus called him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today" (Lk 19:5). Jesus invited himself and his disciples to Zacchaeus' house and gave him the grace of forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Jesus declared to the world, "He is also a son of Abraham." It was indeed a glorious declaration to this wretched man Zacchaeus. Then Zacchaeus' heart was changed. He confessed he would give half of his possessions to the poor and if he owed anything to anybody he would pay them back four times as much. If he really wanted to do so, he had to get a huge loan from the bank. It was impossible for him. But his repentant testimony was very sincere and tearful. More than that, his story tells us that money didn't make him happy. Jesus made him happy when he came to Jesus as he was.

As was Zacchaeus, the Sadducees were fallen men because they did not know the Bible. What they worried about was whom to marry and when they would die. And who could make their hair stand on end was in their minds. They were greedy and selfish. Romans 2:7,8 says, "To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." The Sadducees were in God's wrath and anger.

II. The God of Abraham (24-27)

First, they will be like the angels in heaven (24-25). The Sadducees came to Jesus to trap him. How did Jesus deal with them? Jesus knew that they had a malicious intention. But Jesus did not mind. Jesus loved them as a mother loves her children. Jesus said in verse 24, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?" Jesus did not rebuke their immediate evil intention and their motive to trap him. Rather Jesus wanted to help them see their error in light of God's word. When Jesus saw them, they had many problems. But the root problem was that they did not know the Bible and that our God is the living God and the Ruler of human history.

The Sadducees had to believe the basic truths in the Bible. For instance, God created the heavens and the earth and everything in it (Ge 1:1). On the sixth day he made man. God made man in the image of God so that man could grow until he became like Jesus. God made the garden of Eden in the best part of the world. There, God established one family between Adam and Eve so that they could be stewards of God's world. In other words, God gave man mission as the meaning of life. God also gave man a command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Ge 2:17) in order to establish the spiritual order of the universe: God first; mankind second; the world and everything in it third. If there is no order in the world, the world is chaotic and lawless. The Sadducees especially had to know that God made his one and only Son a ransom sacrifice for the sin of the world. God gave eternal salvation in which they could enjoy the love of God and the peace of God. In fact, they knew all these things. But they suppressed the absolutes of God deliberately, because they were so attached to the things of the world. If they wanted something, it was to live in the world forever as yuppies. They did not know the truth of God that all men are made out of the dust of the ground and all men go back to the dust of the ground. They did not know that God is Spirit (Jn 4:24). They did not know that man is a soul.

There is a story about a queen. Her husband was a despotic king. He was merciless to other people, even to the crown prince. Especially, he killed many Christians. But he loved his wife so dearly for 35 years. In spite of himself, the king gave all of his affection to his wife. When the king felt he was going to die, he said to his wife, "You can request anything you want in your heart. Then the request will be granted, whatever it may be." The queen confessed that she had secretly been a Christian for the last 30 years. And she pleaded with the king that she be baptized by a missionary and receive eternal salvation. The king was surprised that the queen did not appreciate the power and glory of his kingdom. But as he promised, he said, "Your request is granted," and cried. The queen's story tells us that God made man to be happy when his soul is in Jesus.

Contrary to the Sadducees' thought, death is not the end of everything. Man is immortal. Man has eternal life. Man has God's promise that he will inherit the kingdom of God. John 6:63 says, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." When we die, our flesh goes back to the dust of the ground because it came from the dust. But our soul lives forever.

Read verse 25. "When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." Here "angels" do not merely refer to God's messengers or neutral beings as ordinary angels. In this case the words, "like the angels," mean that they will be like Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:49 says, "And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven." Jesus did not talk about the struggle of marriage or possessions. Jesus told them that they would enjoy eternal salvation and the beauty of the kingdom forever. When we believe in the resurrection of Jesus we can receive the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God gives us joy and peace and security. We must hear Jesus' words, "They will be like the angels in heaven." When we hear Jesus' words we can believe that we shall be like Jesus.

Second, God is living (26-27). Look at verse 26. "Now about the dead rising--have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?" This verse is a quotation of Exodus 3:6. When Moses gave up his princship in the Egyptian Empire and chose to live with the people of God, he had to undergo 40 years of wilderness life with Jethro's seven daughters. He could not feel that God was living in his fugitive life. Once Moses saw a bush burning. It was burning continuously. So he went near it to look at it more carefully. Suddenly the word of God came to him. "Moses, Moses, take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Ex 3:4,5). Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6). Here God was teaching Moses that he is living. At this moment, Moses was aware of God's presence. God is living. Verse 27a says, "He is not the God of the dead but of the living." God is also Father to all mankind. Humanly speaking, God has to be Father to Abraham and God has to be Grandfather to Isaac and God has to be Great-Grandfather to Jacob. But God says, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." This tells us that there is one God and all men of all generations are his precious children.

Most importantly, Jesus is teaching the Sadducees that God is ruling world history. At the time Moses lived, the civilization of Babylonia was gone. It was the time of the Egyptian Empire. The Egyptians invented mathematics, astronomy and the art of oratory. Thus the Egyptian Empire culminated the peak of human civilization in history. Moses was born a Hebrew slave. But by God's providence, he became a prince, the son of Pharaoh's daughter. When we review human history, we see that Babylonian civilization is gone. Greek civilization is gone. Roman civilization is gone. After Roman civilization, barbarian civilization is going on. The world changes morning by morning. But God's history is steadily moving on toward God's will for world salvation. As God promised, God sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ. According to God's will, Jesus died and rose again. The worldly kingdom is very temporal and kings and queens are born

to be sorrowful and miserable because of their sins. But God is the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He is living and he is ruling the world to save men from their sins without missing anyone.

In this passage we learn that the Sadducees could not buy happiness with money. There may be many who want to buy happiness in exchange for twelve trunks of greenbacks. There are also those who know that happiness comes from God when we believe in him, but their sinful nature has grown to the full extent and it never allows them to come to God. Faith to come to Jesus is simple faith, as simple as that of children. Many people who are getting old are sad because their wrinkles increase day by day. But in this passage we learn that we don't have to worry about this. It's because there is no marriage problem in Jesus. Also, we will all be like the angels; we will all be like Jesus. We have eternal salvation in Jesus. In this passage we must remember that man is both body and spirit and we are precious children of God forever.