

God of the Living
Mark 12:18-27
ABC 3/31/24

You're all going to die! Isn't that a great way to begin a sermon, especially an Easter one? Just be glad I didn't do it with a lunatic laugh. But the truth is you all are going to die. The statistics are certain. How many of you have lost a loved one? One day you'll die too. What happens after you die? Everyone has thought about this. What happens when you die? Is there life after death? I went to ChatGPT (AI) for the answer. It said, *Ultimately the question of whether there is life after death is a matter of personal belief & interpretation, & different people may come to different conclusions based on their own experiences & worldview.*¹ That's not much of an answer. A recent survey found 83% of Americans believe in some kind of afterlife.² According to Steve Jobs' biographer, he said this:

*Sometimes I believe in God, sometimes I don't. But ever since I've had cancer, I've been thinking about it more. & I find myself believing a bit more. Maybe it's because I want to believe in an afterlife. That when you die, it doesn't just all disappear. I just can't accept that the body just turns off one day & then it's all over. You're gone forever ... There's got to be more to it than that.*³

That's the hope in every human heart & has been expressed by people in every culture & every age. The Egyptian *Book of the Dead* is filled with a hope of a resurrection life. A burial practice in Ancient Greece was the placement of a coin in the mouth or near the body of the dead as payment for the ferryman of the underworld for the journey into the afterlife.⁴ The Lakota Indians believe in an afterlife in which the deceased are free of pain & suffering. Part of this universal desire for life after death isn't merely to live forever, but to live forever bodily, not floating around as a spirit. We were created to anticipate life after death. For the most part, everyone wants this & the Jews were no different. It was part of Jewish thinking that there was life after death. Jewish leaders & people alike held to the belief of a resurrection from the dead. The Pharisees would debate what it would be like when the resurrection happened. Would people rise from the dead clothed or unclothed? If they wore clothes, would it be the clothes they were

¹ <https://chat.openai.com/888>

² www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/11/23/views-on-the-afterlife/

³ www.zdnet.com/article/steve-jobs-in-the-end-he-didnt-like-the-off-switch/

⁴ <https://red.library.usd.edu/idea/74/>

buried in or would they be new ones? They discussed things like, if you were born without a hand, would you rise without a hand? The consensus of the Pharisees was that everyone rose from the dead exactly the way they were when they died. The Sadducees were different & scoffed at those who thought there'd be a resurrection & an afterlife. Far more important than any of these beliefs is what does God say about the resurrection? What would Jesus say to someone who didn't believe in a physical resurrection? I think we all know the answer. Christianity has always believed in life after death because of the teaching of Scripture & the power of God demonstrated through an empty tomb & a resurrected Jesus. The hope of a right relationship with God & heaven hinges on whether or not Jesus is alive. The good news is it's true. Jesus conquered death & is alive. Do you believe this? Open to Mark 12. I've only done this once or twice in 36 years of preaching but I'm using the same text today as I did last time. Go to the website to get that sermon if you missed it.⁵

Tensions were high in Jerusalem with different religious & political factions coming to question Jesus in the week before His death. Their goal was to expose Him as a fraud & to get rid of Him permanently. But every attempt is met by Jesus with amazing wisdom & authority that leaves His questioners exposed as hypocrites. When asked about the afterlife, what Jesus' says is critical to us today if Jesus is who He says He is & if He rose from the dead. **18-27**

The Sadducees dominated the political & religious scene in Jesus' day. Contrary to the Pharisees & most Jews, they didn't believe in an afterlife. Josephus said of them, *the doctrine of the Sadducees is this; that souls die with the bodies.*⁶ Because they didn't believe in any life after death, there was no judgment, no rewards, & no penalties. As a result, they lived for the moment, for the here & now. They only followed the 1st 5 books of the Bible & didn't believe in angels or demons or the afterlife. Their view was once you're dead you're dead. There was no hope beyond the grave. This life is all there is. They believed that the goal of life is to live your best life now. Live for today because tomorrow you die & that's it.

⁵ www.ashlandbiblechurch.com/march-17-2024-mark-1218-27-resurrection-question.html

⁶ *Antiquities, Book 18, chpt 1*

1. Did Jesus Believe in Resurrection Life? The Sadducees saw Jesus as a threat. His views on resurrection & the afterlife were dangerous because it would lead people to believe there's something better after death. It would get people's hopes up. It would devalue present-day life & the things of today which would weaken their control. This became a major point of controversy between the Sadducees & the Pharisees. Early on, the apostles were teaching the resurrection, which greatly bothered the Sadducees. Acts 4:1 says, **As they (the apostles) were speaking to the people, the priests & the captain of the temple guard & the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people & proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.** Later, Paul used this division over the resurrection between the Pharisees & Sadducees against them.

But perceiving that one group were Sadducees & the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, 'Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope & resurrection of the dead!' As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees & Sadducees, & the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all (Acts 23:6-8).

Some people today are like the Sadducees. They're convinced that religion is *the opiate of the masses*, deceiving people to believe in some fairy tale of an afterlife. They want to be able to explain the world through science & their own understanding. In our text, the Sadducees come to Jesus with an antagonistic, ridiculous question. They weren't trying to get a legitimate answer but were trying to make a point & humiliate Jesus. Here's their hypothetical situation: a woman marries a man, he dies. According to Dt 25:5-6, the brother of the man is to marry his dead brother's widow to carry on his name. If he refused, she could publicly shame him, throw a shoe at him, & spit in his face. The Sadducees here quote Scripture to its Author. They're asking the living Word of God to explain God's written Word. How do you think it will turn out? In the Sadducees story, the brothers were honorable men. She marries the 1st brother & he dies. 2nd brother, same thing. She works through the 7 brothers until the 7th brother also dies, none giving her children. If you were brother #3-7, wouldn't you have thought she was dangerous & it may be better to just have a shoe thrown at you & be spit on than marry her? Anyway, that's the set-up. Here's the question: **In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be?**

For all 7 had married her (23). For the sake of the argument, they were willing to grant the resurrection, but their question revealed how ridiculous the whole idea was to them. Their scenario describes their difficulty with the resurrection which they knew Jesus believed & talked about. The question confidently assumes she'll be the wife of one of her husbands in the resurrection, but which one? They assume that resurrection life is just a continuation of life down here. If they were to answer their own question, they'd say she's no one's wife because there is no resurrection. She no longer exists & neither do her husbands. But since they know Jesus believes in the resurrection they think they've asked Him a question that will reveal His lack of understanding of spiritual matters & place doubt in His followers whether Jesus is really the Messiah or not. In their minds, this was a *gotcha* moment. If Jesus says, *All of them*, He'd be saying she'd have a harem of men in heaven & that was laughable. If He said, *the 1st*, He'd be saying the other marriages didn't matter. Again, this wasn't a legitimate question but a power play. But some of you have sincere questions & objections to Christianity. You may ask, *If God is good, why is there so much suffering in the world? If God is love, why would He send anyone to hell? If God is real, why haven't all my prayers been answered?* Those are valid questions that have been asked & answered by those who wrote the Bible. There's nothing wrong with asking those questions. Go to Scripture to find the answer. But the bigger question is this: Is Jesus who He says He is? If Jesus is who He says He is, then there are answers to those questions even if we don't know them yet. If Jesus is God & rose from the dead that means He knows the answers to all those questions. Don't let your questions keep you from listening & trusting in Jesus. If Jesus is raised from the dead, then everything He says matters. Jesus tells the Sadducees, *You are wrong, quite wrong*. They were wrong because they didn't know the Scriptures & the power of God. They were ignorant of who Jesus is & what He came to do & their question revealed it. Jesus tells them that in the resurrection there is no marriage. Jesus isn't saying marriage is unimportant but that it's temporary. The Sadducees assumed if there were to be a resurrection it's just a continuation of the life you already have. They saw life only in categories they could comprehend & explain. They didn't have the power of God in mind. Notice how gracious Jesus is.

He didn't openly denounce them but quietly assumed their mistake was due to error & proceeded to show them why. Jesus skillfully put His answer in the form of a question, **Is this not the reason you are mistaken...?** which implies an affirmative answer. He invites them to examine themselves & discover the truth. What's the truth? They **do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God**. They thought they denied the resurrection because they were enlightened. But Jesus says their struggle with the resurrection was due to their ignorance. When Jesus says, **For when they rise from the dead**, He's expressing absolute certainty there is a resurrection. He knew resurrection from the dead was a real thing. He believed it so much that He raised Lazarus from the dead as an object lesson. He believed it so much He said, **I am the resurrection & the life** (Jn 11:25-26). He believed it so much that He would rise from the dead. It's not a matter of *if* the resurrection of God's people is going to happen, but *when*. But it won't be a continuation of this life. It will be different, so different that we'll be **like angels in heaven** regarding marriage. No, we don't become angels. God created angels as servants & messengers, & angels don't marry or propagate, & don't die & won't be resurrected. On Earth, where death reigns, marriage & childbearing are important to **be fruitful & multiply, & fill the earth** (Gen 1:28). But having kids won't be necessary in the resurrection life because people will be raised to glorify God forever & there will be no more death. The fact that we'll be like angels means those of us in heaven will share the immortal nature of angels. We'll be eternal, spiritual beings, eventually reunited with our bodies, which will never die. None of us can imagine how amazing resurrection life will be & how different our resurrection body will be. The beauty, majesty, glory, & power of resurrection life is beyond our ability to comprehend. God's power in transforming the resurrection body no longer makes marriage a necessary part of the future state. Marriage, sex, & family relationships will be surpassed by perfect communion with God & perfect communion with each other. We don't know everything about resurrection life, but Jesus says our relationships will be different from what we're used to here. It's not a continuation of this life but a transformation of to new life. It's not just life after death, but life that never dies & is better than anything we can even imagine. Some people think, *I don't want to be a Christian or go to heaven because I have to*

give up something I love here on earth. They think there won't be ice cream or basketball or TV or sex or beaches or fishing in heaven. But whatever heaven is like, it's far better than we can imagine. Even though marriage doesn't exist in heaven, all of our relationships in the resurrected life will be much closer, deeper, richer, & more satisfying than the greatest marriage or relationship now. The infinitely creative God who made everything in this world with all the fish, birds, sunsets, plants, animals, colors, & smells in only 6 days will outdo Himself in the new creation, making it far better than this one. In heaven, with your resurrected life & body, it will be a thousand million times better. Every relationship will be richer & more meaningful. Everything will be beyond our wildest imaginations. This isn't our best life now. Something better is in store. The truth is, if you tie your life on earth to everything there is now, you'll never be happy & always be disappointed. But if you know there's a better life that you were created for then you have freedom to live now without fear. Jesus continues, **regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses ... ?** (26). Once again, Jesus is sure of the resurrection. This was a jab at the Sadducees who were experts in the 1st 5 books of the Bible. Did the Pentateuch teach of the resurrection of the dead? They didn't think so. But Jesus points them to Ex 3:6 which says God said to Moses, **I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, & the God of Jacob.** When God says this at the burning bush, all these men are dead, yet God speaks as if they're still alive. It's in the present tense not the past. *I was* are often sad words when it comes to relationships. *I was married, I was happy, I was a dad, I was a friend, I was in love.* The *I was* is what we once were in the past but now that's over. But *I was* isn't something God says about His relationship with His people. But Jesus wasn't making His case on the verb tense, but on the name & nature of God, YHWH, the covenant-keeping God. When God says, *I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob,* He's referring to the promises He made to these men. The promises God gave has nothing to do with Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob but was built on God Himself. This means that as God is eternal so is our relationship with Him. If Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob are dead & gone forever then the promises God made to them have failed & He isn't God. But if God is God, then His promises are sure & therefore, they are more alive now than

they were when they lived on earth. There's a life after death that's greater than we can imagine but it's only for those who have a relationship with God. Jesus says, **He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.** By His very nature, God is the God of the living. If God is the God of the patriarchs, He doesn't cease to be God at death. He continues to be their God & will fulfill His promises to them. This is a clear description of the Lord's power to resurrect believers to life. The everlasting covenant God made with these men involved an everlasting relationship that can't be ended by death. The patriarchs were dead in the visible world but were still alive in the invisible world. Death certainly changes our relationship with our world but it doesn't change our relationship to God. We experience eternal fellowship with Him, now & forever. Jesus says to the Sadducees, **You are greatly mistaken, you're totally wrong. You're deceiving yourself. The patriarchs are alive today. God is the God of the living.** As Paul tells us, **if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you** (Rom 8:11).

2. What Does the Resurrection Mean For Us? The people in Jesus' day thought the marriage relationship wouldn't change in the afterlife. But marriage is just *'til death do you part*. Jesus said, *The only relationship that will never change in the afterlife is your relationship with God here on earth.* If you die with a personal relationship with Him your relationship with Him will only get better. Christianity isn't just believing in Jesus, pray some prayer, & go to heaven. It's more than that, it's a personal relationship. If God is your God then not even death can separate you from Him. As Paul writes in Rom 8:38-39, **I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Nothing can separate us. Our past cannot separate us, our sin cannot separate us, our pain & suffering cannot separate us, & even our death cannot separate us because nothing can separate us from Him & His love. How do we know? How can we be sure? The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is proof that everything Jesus said was true & everything He did worked. Jesus spoke of the resurrection of the dead as He was about to die on the cross. If Jesus just died

& is still dead, we have no hope. But if He is alive, as He predicted, as 100's of eyewitnesses testified & countless billions have trusted in, then we have hope & everything He promised will come to pass. Just a few days before this encounter with the Sadducees, Jesus attended the funeral of one of His friends, Lazarus. As Lazarus' sisters were grieving that they'd never see their brother again. Jesus looked at them & said, **I am the resurrection & the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, & everyone who lives & believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?** (Jn 11:25-26). How do we know this is true? Because Jesus, God in sinless human flesh, says so. Beyond this, we read in Mk 16:1-6,

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, & Mary the *mother* of James, & Salome, bought spices, so that they might come & anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; & they were amazed. & he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, *here is* the place where they laid Him.

What you believe about Jesus is the most important decision of your life now & forever. Paul writes, **if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, & believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved** (Rom 10:9). In the Rocky Mountains there's a famous dividing line, the Continental Divide. All the water that falls to the East of that line flows toward the Atlantic Ocean. All the water on the West side of that line does the same thing headed toward the Pacific. (OK, not all the water, there is the Great Basin). This means 2 raindrops, falling side by side through the sky, only inches apart, land on different sides of that line & end up oceans apart. That same thing happens here, right now. Seated side by side, inches apart, are 2 people who will land on different sides of Jesus. One ends up in the unspeakable joys of heaven. The other ends up in hell, an eternal place of torment. Two people, side by side today, that end up eternities apart. Which side are you on? Are you looking forward to your future? Maybe you're thinking, *If we're like angels, will we have wings? Will we recognize each other? Will we be neutered, sexless?* If you've had such thoughts, remember the point of this text is that your body will be resurrected. Hebrew thinking regarded each person as a unity with physical & immaterial parts, body & spirit, which are perfectly fused together so that one is incomplete without the

other. Our bodies are part of who we are. When God said He was **the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, & the God of Jacob**, He's saying He's the God of their whole person, body & spirit. The whole person will be resurrected. Our bodies, to use Paul's word, will be raised **imperishable** (1 Cor 15:42). The whole person, body & soul, will experience eternal life. You, not just your spirit, will be resurrected. This means your body will be preserved for eternity. Abraham has everything about him that was Abrahamic. Isaac has everything that makes him Isaac, only better. Jacob has everything that makes him God's Israel. These men have lost nothing & gained everything. They have grown & developed gloriously. They are Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob at their very best, or at least will be, at their ultimate resurrection. One pastor said,

The new body must be like the old. Not only that, it must be the same body ... with all that was distinctive of each from his fellows more visible than ever before. The accidental, the nonessential, the unrevealing, the incomplete will have vanished. That which made the body what it was in the eyes of those who loved us will be tenfold there.⁷

You'll be more recognizable & more lovable in heaven than ever before. When someone asks, *Will you know me in Heaven?* the answer I believe is, *I will know you fully & love you perfectly.* There will be no marriage in heaven & no concern about past husbands or wives, but that doesn't suggest a reduction in love or relationships in the slightest. You'll be yourself, at your ultimate best, & you'll be more lovable & more loving than ever before. You'll never be subjected to death or disability or sorrow or sin again. Everything flawed here will be perfected there. Your body will be glorious, grown to its eternal potential. Your personality will be at its fullest. Your wit, charm, & even your words will be beautiful since you'll be like Jesus. Do you have a future with Jesus? Jesus said of the Father, **He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.** God has an eternal relationship with the living. But it'll only be those who are in Christ who'll be resurrected to life eternal. Those without Jesus will be resurrected with their bodies to eternal hell. Where does your hope rest? Are you trusting in Jesus, who became a man, died for your sin, took your punishment, & calls you to exchange your life for His? Are you hoping in Him? If we hope only in this life, we are to be pitied most of all (1 Cor 15:19). Only Jesus can give you a resurrection certainty. Jesus never doubted. He was certain. You can be certain too. Paul's desire was **that I**

⁷ George MacDonald, sermon titled, *The God of the Living*, www.online-literature.com/george-macdonald/unspeaken-sermons/12/

may know Jesus & the power of His resurrection (Phil 3:10). Is that your desire? The power of God has raised Jesus from the dead & that same power will raise you if you place your faith in Christ. **Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power** (1 Cor 6:14). Jesus not only taught the doctrine of the resurrection He also lived it. His tomb is empty. He has risen. Those who enjoy a relationship with God enjoy an everlasting, never-ending relationship with Him. Not because they are great but because He is great. What's the problem that must be overcome if someone is going to have a relationship with God that will never end? Sin & death. God will not die, but we will. & we don't have the power to defeat the grave. God has to have an answer for death if this relationship is going to survive the grave. All our hope rests in the power of God when we're faced with the problem of sin & death. To get eternity right, we must reckon with 2 massive problems that stand between us & eternal life: guilt & the grave. We are all guilty before God. The Bible says we've all sinned & fallen short of God's glory (Rom 3:23). It says **the wages of sin is death** (Rom 6:23). We all are guilty & deserving of condemnation. We can't be good enough to make up for all the times we've sinned & fallen short. The standard is not other people (I'll go to heaven because I'm better than others). The standard isn't some abstract idea of moral balance (on the scales of good & evil, I'm OK because I do more good things than bad things). The standard is God. God does not & cannot wink at, minimize, or excuse sin. God is just. Every sin must be punished. There are only 2 options for our guilt. Either you pay for your sin personally in hell or Jesus pays for your sin in your place at the cross. That horrible, gruesome death that Jesus suffered was your death; it was in your place. He was crushed for our iniquities (Is 53:5). But how does God deal with the grave? Jesus took on flesh so He could become kill-able (He died for our sins) & so that He could defeat the grave from within the grave. What do I mean? Death could not hold Him because it had no hold on Him. Death is the wages of sin. The Bible says, **O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin...** (1 Cor 15:55-56). Jesus never sinned, so death couldn't win. Jesus took away the sting of death. Death looked at Jesus like a lion looks at a lamb. But the sacrificial Lamb became the roaring Lion who tore death to shreds. When the Lord of life rose,

death died. Death is defeated! Jesus is victorious! Sin can't win & death won't have the last word. Jesus does. He will not let death separate Him from His bride! He never will ever have a moment where He has to talk about His bride in the past tense: *She was My bride*. No! *I am her Husband because I am the resurrection. I have dealt with her guilt & the grave. She is My bride forever*. Nothing can separate us from His presence & love (Rom 8:38–39). His death means no death for those who put their trust in Him. His resurrection assures our resurrection. For centuries, Jesus has proven faithful. Millions have trusted in Him & He's safely brought them home. He died on the cross & rose from the dead to make a way because there is no other way. Once we trust in Him we'll never be the same. What you do with Jesus today makes all the difference in your life now & forever. I invite you to receive what Jesus has done for you to guarantee your future in heaven with a resurrected, perfect, sinless body. Because He was raised His followers will be too. Do you hear Jesus saying, *I am the resurrection so I am sure that death cannot separate My bride from my death-defeating, grave-conquering love?* If you aren't yet a believer this morning, that can change right now. Put your faith in Jesus. If you are a believer, I pray that the resurrection of Jesus will leave you more in love with Jesus than ever. You can look at the price Jesus paid to remove your guilt & the power Jesus used to conquer death. Does the Father truly love us & does Jesus hold forever those He loves? He does. He holds them forever because death couldn't hold Him so it can't hold His bride either. When we see Him, whatever doesn't make sense to us here won't matter. Our faith will be sight. Our trust will be perfect. May we be growing toward more perfect trust even now as we behold Him through His Word & look forward to our resurrection.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come (Eph 1:18-21).