

“WHOSE WILL SHE BE: BIBLICAL IGNORANCE IN HIGH PLACES.”

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Scripture Texts: Mark 12:18-27

Introduction.

If I was going to change the title of this sermon I would be tempted to call it, “Seven Brothers for One Bride.” But “Biblical Ignorance in High Places” fits quite well.

Mark 12:18

To understand our text we need some background on these men called Sadducees. I mentioned last week that the ruling supreme court of Israel was called the Sanhedrin. It was made up of the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the scribes, and was ruled over by the high priest.

There was no love lost between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. But like the Herodians before, enemies are joined in a common cause. The darkness hates the light where ever it’s found.

The Sadducees were the minority group, the smallest in number, but they were also the wealthiest and most powerful sect. They were the aristocracy, they held the highest positions.

They ran the temple and controlled the priests from the high priest on down. In fact when the temple was destroyed in 70AD the Sadducees disappeared. That was their jurisdiction, their place of power and authority. When it went away so did they.

They were also in the minority with regard to what they believed. The religion of the people was what the Pharisees believed. The Sadducees were the powerful liberals of their day.

They considered only the first five books of Moses to be the authoritative Scripture. They rejected the Prophets and the Writings, meaning everything after Deuteronomy. Since they found no references in the first five books to angels or resurrection they denied both of those doctrines.

No angels, no demons, no life after death, no supernatural. The word “denying” pretty well summed them up. They were the modernists, the liberals.

Mark 12:19-23, Whose wife will she be?

Just as last week’s question about taxes was a pure hypocrisy so is this week’s question. They were asking about a resurrection they don’t even believe in.

They claim to want to know the answer to a hard question they have been wrestling with. But of course they don’t care about the woman or the resurrection. They care only about exposing Jesus as a fool.

They asked a question based on Scripture quoting from Moses in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 about Levirate marriage which was God's legal provision that a childless widow could marry her deceased husband's brother in order to bear a male child to preserve the family name and family inheritance.

From this the Sadducees concocted a ridiculous hypothetical story of seven brothers who marry a widow in succession. They want to make the whole idea look as ridiculous as they can. "Hey Jesus, what about a woman who has seven husbands? Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?"

I can imagine them all looking at each other with winks and smirks, if not outright laughter. Their goal is to make Jesus look stupid by affirming an absurdity. This is often the goal of liberals.

You don't really believe in the resurrection do you? That's so last century.

You don't really believe that God created the world in 6 days do you? Nobody thinks that anymore.

You don't really believe the Red Sea parted or that Jonah was swallowed by a whale do you?

Liberals love to pour contempt on the plain truths of Scripture.

I heard a pastor in a debate one time being questioned, "Do you really believe that story about Jonah being swallowed by a whale?" He answered simply, "I'm a Christian, I believe the Bible." No apology, no embarrassment.

Mark 12:24-27, You know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.

Of all the questions Jesus is asked this one receives His sharpest rebuke. They are twisting the Word of God, they are mocking Scripture. Jesus made a direct attack. "You are wrong. You know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God."

The Sadducees prided themselves on their knowledge of the Torah and they were all about power. Scripture and power were their double majors.

This would be like saying Wall Street knows nothing about money or Mayo Clinic knows nothing about medicine.

Jesus' answer has two parts. First, *He destroys the false assumption* their question was based on.

The Jews generally believed the resurrection was like a continuation of the earthly life but in a new place, and that it included marriage.

Jesus says no, the resurrection isn't just breathing life back into a dead body, it's a complete transformation of the body and of all human relationships. In the resurrection we will have spiritual bodies and live like the angels and have relationships that supersede marriage.

Jesus had to create new categories for them to think in since their present earthly categories were insufficient. So He said we will be like angels in heaven (which was a dig at the Sadducees unbelief).

We won't be *angels*. Angels are spiritual beings without bodies. We will be spiritual beings with bodies. We will be like angels, we will not cohabit or marry or give birth. We will be eternal. Because we will be eternal there won't be the need to increase a dying race of man.

The purpose of marriage is to propagate a godly seed, and to reflect to the world the glory of Christ and His relationship to His bride. This will no longer be necessary.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. After addressing their faulty assumptions *Jesus then makes an argument for the fact of the resurrection from Scripture*. He seizes the opportunity to expose the lie of their disbelief in the resurrection.

Jesus unravels their argument by quoting from the same Scriptures they claim to have read. "Have you not read in the book of Moses?" Ouch.

Jesus gives Exodus 3:6 the fullest possible meaning. If in the time of Moses, 500 years after Abraham is dead, God says "He is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," then there must still be an Abraham to be God of. If the living God has a living relationship with a man, then that man must still be alive, even though he physically died.

God speaks in the present tense. He doesn't say that He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God is not the God of corpses, He is the God of people who are alive with Him.

We know Jesus hit the mark because the people marveled again and the Sadducees were silenced. They failed just as miserably at the Pharisees and the Herodians. We don't have to fear or be taken in by liberals and deceivers. Jesus' answers still stand.

Application and Conclusion.

I want to make two applications this morning from our text.

Those who say there is no resurrection.

We see in this story how old unbelief is and how relevant this story is today. We must not be surprised when in the church of Jesus Christ there are wolves in sheep's clothing, deceivers, heretics, free-thinkers, men who tickle the ears and seek to draw away disciples after them.

This is not some sort of rare or strange thing. Since the day Eve was deceived and believed Satan there has been unbelief among God's people. Jude warned of the same thing.

Jude 1:3-4 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Today this comes in so many forms. The so called lost books of the Bible; the Da Vinci Code; TBN; Joel Osteen; Oprah; and a whole host of books and pastors and professors who deny certain elements of the Bible and our faith, all in the name of sound reason or new scholarship.

I had my annual evaluation by the executive committee of the council this past Tuesday. Toward the end of the evaluation one of the council members said he had a question for me. He said he had read a survey of protestant pastors that found that between 49% and 87% of them, depending on the denomination, did not accept Jesus' physical resurrection as a fact. So he asked me if I believed in the physical resurrection of Jesus.

In 2005 another poll was conducted among Reformed and conservative evangelicals. That poll found that about 10% didn't believe in the physical resurrection. That was about 8 years ago.

Our Christian and Reformed roots in this country go back to John Knox and the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, and back to Guido deBres and the Reformed Church in Holland. Today both of those mother churches have departed from the Word of God and from historic, orthodox Christianity.

Many of those pastors deny the Trinity, they deny Christ's penal substitutionary atonement, they deny His virginal conception by the power of the Holy Spirit, they deny His bodily resurrection, and they deny the full, infallible authority of the Word of God.

I predict that a senior pastor search committee at First CRC in about 25 years is going to have a harder time finding a pastor who holds to the orthodox truths of our Christian and Reformed faith.

I predict that that same search committee will not have the luxury of asking secondary questions about how the pastor will shepherd the flock and what his strengths and weaknesses are and whether or not his wife will be active in the ministry. They will have to ask point blank questions like I was asked, "Do you believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead?"

C.S. Lewis once observed that it used to be the people in the pew were a bit embarrassed by how much the pastor believed. But now the people in the pew were embarrassed by how little the pastor believed.

In denomination after denomination across our country the headquarters and the staff and seminary professors and senior pastors are believing less and less, they are denying more tenants of the faith, while the people are being left behind or lead astray. The smaller minority of deniers are in control of the seminaries and publications and policies.

Let's remember that all error comes from not knowing the Word of God. The moral and spiritual confusion in our culture today comes from neglecting to know the truth found in God's Word.

The hope for any individual or family or church or nation is found in returning to the Bible. The people and families and churches and nations that are most flourishing are the ones living closest to Scripture.

If you fail to do anything else for your children, don't fail to give them a knowledge of and a love for the Word of God.

We must not give Jesus any reason to say to us, "You are wrong because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."

Be diligent in your reading and studying of the Bible. Take advantage of the opportunities given to you to systematically read through the Bible. Take advantage of the freedoms you have to freely and regularly meet for worship and to hear the Word preached. Take advantage of opportunities to meet with others in Bible studies. Take every opportunity to read and explain the Bible to your children.

The afterlife, the life of the saints in heaven.

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

God's people have believed in the resurrection from the beginning. Hebrews 11 tells us that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and all the Patriarchs looked forward to a better place.

Hebrews 11:10, 16 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. ... 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Don't be put off by the Sadducees among us today. We shall all rise again, first the dead in Christ and then all who remain that are alive.

Belief in the resurrection is belief in the truth of Scripture and in the unbounded power of God to raise the dead to life again.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Ephesians 1:19-20 ... the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

Philippians 3:20-21 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Brothers and sisters, if God is your God then there is unbelievable power at work on your behalf. The power that created the universe and the power that raised Jesus out of the grave is working for you also. There is so much power working for you that you can never be robbed of life.

Jesus couldn't stay dead and neither can those who are in Christ.

No wonder Paul declares with confidence and conviction:

Romans 8:38-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let this truth be your strength in the face of trial and your peace and comfort at the hour of your death. Our God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living.

No one can be a father without children, or a king without subjects. So God cannot be Lord except of the living. It's folly to believe that we who are created in God's image should be completely extinguished in death.

Heaven is a topic that is totally foreign to the unbeliever. Few subjects reveal their folly quicker. I had a math teacher in high school who mock heaven saying who would want to go to a place where you have to wear white robes and play a harp or sing in a choir forever. He couldn't imagine anything more boring than heaven. The pagan mind can't begin to comprehend or appreciate it.

Trying to imagine what heaven is like, is like a baby in the womb trying to imagine what life on earth is like. How can a baby begin to imagine the beauty of a sunset or a symphony or the pleasure of a box of fine chocolates or the joy of friendship and laughter?

The serious business of heaven is joy, said Chesterton. Our happiness in heaven will be a spiritual happiness far above what we know here on earth. Heaven will be joy beyond measure. Whatever God has in store for us, it will be glorious beyond all human imagining. The best really is yet to come.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.