

## THE GOD OF THE LIVING

Mark 12:18-27 (Key verse 27)

*"He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"*

We are continuing with the series of events whereby Jesus is questioned on matters of the faith. However in today's passage Jesus reveals something some of us might have actually asked ourselves. How will life be like after the resurrection of the dead or in the kingdom of God. Is life after the resurrection and extension of our lives here on earth only that there will not be any sin? Will we continue to marry and be given in marriage? How will we be like? Just to recap, in the past weeks Jesus was approached by the Chief priests and teachers of the law. They questioned Jesus about his authority. Jesus never gave them an answer because they failed to give Jesus an answer on John's authority in baptizing the people. Then last week, the Pharisees and the Herodians also came to Jesus with a question, is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? They wanted a yes or a no answer. As we learned Jesus taught them that we should give to Caesar what is Caesar and to God what is God's. In today's passage Jesus is yet again confronted by a certain group of the Jewish sect, the Sadducees. However through their interaction with Jesus, Jesus reveals a profound truth regarding how life will be like in the kingdom of God, after the resurrection of the dead. In today's passage Jesus gives a very interesting answer. However, this truth is not easy to accept because our minds are usually cluttered with worldly things, and we tend to read the Bible based on our human limitations and logic. It is hard to imagine any other life or any other form of ourselves. It is actually impossible to accept Jesus answer without believing in the living God. Because to believe in the living God is to believe and trust in His power. May we learn through this passage today, what it means practically in our lives, that our God is living and that he is the God of the living.

Look at verse 18, Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. The Sadducees were one of the three prominent sects of the Jewish religion. There was the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Essenes. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection, the Torah which is the written law, and the Talmud, the oral law. However the Sadducees, believed only in the written Law or the five books of Moses. So they were convicted that the doctrine of the resurrection could not be found in the five books of Moses, which are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers. They believed that the rest of the Old Testament was commentary or extrapolations/interpretation on Moses writing and as such could not be true or hold authority. They also rejected the rest of the Old Testament and the prophets. They didn't believe in the immortality of the soul and God's judgment after death. It is said that their main focus was rituals associated with the temple. Thus it is known that after the demolition of the Temple in 70 A.D the Sadducees went extinct. It is not hard to see that they most probably lived a religious life to get earthly blessings from God such as wealth, honor, good health and long life. The Essenes, a third faction, believed that the Pharisees and the Sadducees had corrupted the city of Jerusalem and the temple. They sought piety and so lived a monastic life in the desert. So the Sadducees were in constant battles or debates with the Pharisees regarding the resurrection of the dead because this was their main fundamental difference. The Pharisees held the position that the life after the resurrection is an extension of our earthly life. Which actually led them to frame a question to Jesus as we shall see. They also knew about Jesus teachings that Jesus did believe in the resurrection of the dead. They must have heard about the resurrection of Lazarus and when Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though they die will

live." So it is clear that Jesus is a great challenge to what is fundamental to their believe, which means their sect will lose its authority and power because of Jesus. So they too also came to Jesus to ridicule him, with an absurd made up story regarding the resurrection.

Look at verse 19-23, "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother." Take note that they are quoting from one of the five books written by Moses, Deuteronomy 25:5, which reads "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." There was a law which was concerned about preserving the name of the oldest brother within the tribe of Israel. It was the duty of the husband's brother to take the widow and marry her in order to preserve the name and honor of the oldest son, his tribe and his land. Because the son born out of this second marriage will take the name of the first husband and preserve his lineage. This too also made sure that the widow was taken care of. And of course this was only possible if the younger brother was single and not married. This was the custom and a standard that was laid by Moses and the young brother would be called a kinsman redeemer who would then take the widow as their wife. Remember the book of Ruth we did at the beginning of the year. Ruth became a widow and had no children to continue the lineage of Elimelech and this law was exercised. Boaz became the kinsman redeemer for Ruth to continue the lineage of Elimelech because he was the second closest relative to Elimelech. Ruth conceived a son, named him Obed and through him came David and then Jesus our savior.

Now going back to their issue, though they had quoted the law of Moses correctly in verse 19, they then created an absurd scenario in order that they can ridicule Jesus and the doctrine of the resurrection, look at verse 20-23, "Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. 21The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. 22In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. 23At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" This is probably the argument the Pharisees could not answer well. Because according to the Pharisees, after the resurrection, we would still marry and have children after the resurrection. So with that kind of thinking it does create a complicated situation after the resurrection, even if the widow had married up until the second brother. However the Sadducees exaggerated the situation to seven brothers, which is actually absurd. Never the less, their question is interesting, for how will things be like after the resurrection? Your current wife and husband, how would you view each other after the resurrection? If you die single I guess this is not an issue for you. I am soon to be married and I was actually also curious now that the Sadducees asked this question. My mother was in marriage for more than about 32 years when my father passed away. This is a long time and they had become one and become attached to one another. I am sure one of her consolations is that she will see her husband after she passes on one day. However, how will they look at each other or how will it be like if there is the resurrection of the dead?

Let us look at Jesus response in verse 24, "Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?" The Sadducees though they prided themselves on knowing the teachings of Moses, they were in error about the very scriptures. However, what exactly was their error? They tried to understand the resurrection from their human reasoning and not through the scriptures. From their human reasoning if there was the resurrection, our lives after we are risen would simply be an extension of our earthly life. They studied the scriptures based on their

human limitations and reasoning. We should study the bible as though we are hearing directly from God through his word. It should be as though we are looking for hidden treasure. With a heart willing to learn and be rebuked. A quote from Timothy Keller one of the Pastor's in Manhattan New York sums it nicely in his book entitled, *The reason for God*, "Now, what happens if you eliminate anything from the Bible that offends your sensibility and crosses your will? If you pick and choose what you want to believe and reject the rest, how will you ever have a God who can contradict you? You won't! You'll have ...A God, essentially, of your own making, and not a God with whom you can have a relationship and genuine interaction. Only if your God can say things that outrage you and make you struggle (as in a real friendship or marriage!) will you know that you have gotten hold of a real God and not a figment of your imagination. So an authoritative Bible is not the enemy of a personal relationship with God. It is the precondition for it."

The second error they made which is still but related to the scriptures, is that they ignored the power of God. Pay careful attention that, Jesus said you are in error of the scripture OR the power of God. The scriptures and the power of God are interchangeable. That means to believe in the word of God is to believe in the living God who is omniscient and almighty. As the bible says, "All things are possible to him who believes" all things are possible because God is living and powerful. The five books of Moses contain a number of passages and history of God's powerful work. God created man from the dust of the earth, and it was only after God breathed his spirit into man that we became a living being. The exodus from Egypt to Israel was filled with God's power. Israel experience God divide the sea into two. They had a Pillar of fire at night and cloud during the day. One day when they had no water, by prayer God made water gush out of a rock. However, like the Sadducees, many of us commit this common error, that we do not put our faith in the living God and in His power. We live our lives as though God is dead which then makes us head knowledge Christians who deny the very power of God. May we live by faith in the power of God because God is living. Look at verse 25 as Jesus reveals God's power, "When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." We have never heard that there are husbands and wives among the angels in heaven, there is no such a thing in the Bible. And this is because Angels in heaven, do not marry nor are given in marriage, and now Jesus is saying, when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. Those risen from the dead will be like the angels in heaven. They will not be angels but rather they will be like angels. This is all because God is living and is all powerful. So a day is coming when our bodies will be changed, no more sickness, no more aging, no more sin and struggling against sin. If there is one thing I am looking forward to after the resurrection is rest from struggling against my sinfulness.

Now that their logic does not apply because of God's power, Jesus does not waste time to teach them the Bible regarding the resurrection. Jesus continues to use one of the five books of Moses. Let us all read verse 26, "Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?" The Sadducees knew very well the calling of Moses from the burning bush. Jesus did not try to convince the Sadducees with human logic, rather he used the scriptures that they were used to. Exodus 3:4-5 tells us that, one day Moses saw a bush on fire but it was not burning. When he came close, he then heard a voice, "Moses! Moses!...take off your sandals for the place you are standing is holy". Then in Exodus 3:6 the Lord said "...I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." Before this point in time in Moses life, Moses had a similar thinking as the Sadducees. That God was some mythological being far from affecting or

being part of his personal life. That he was just a God of his forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in their legendary stories but not living today. However, through his calling from the bush, Moses could realize and experience the living God even in his time. God is so personal that he called Moses by name. Moses also realized that God was now continuing his redemptive work that he began with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This God is living today, he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses was a sinner just like us and he was not perfect just like us, however when Moses encountered the living God, he could have real meaning and purpose in his life through his imperfections. Moses could not remain the same again. When Abraham, Isaac and Jacob encountered the living God they could be used greatly in the redemptive work of God and death could not have a hold on them, though they died they were risen from the dead. Because not only is God living, but those who have faith in God will live forever. That is why Jesus further says to the Sadducees in verse 27, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!" This means that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still living. Though they died, they were risen from the dead. Because, our God is the God of the living. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Bible does not say, he was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but rather, God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As I stand here today, God is still their God. The Sadducees were grossly mistaken. For the scriptures teach, he is not the God of the dead but of the living.

When we meet Jesus personally we receive a new life, the bible actually says we become born again no longer of natural descent but born of God. God gives us a real meaning and purpose because He is living and is all powerful. How is God's salvation work carried out, it is only through the power of God. It can never be achieved by our human efforts and logic. I have been following the news from Senekal, and I must say this place has become a symbol of how rife the racial tensions still exist in South Africa. However, as Denzel Washington once said, "you can never legislate love, so that people love one another. We have to be intentional in loving one another. It is up to us to love one another." But genuine love requires that we lay down our lives for one another. However, by human strength this I find impossible because of our sinful nature. My hope is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because the gospel of Jesus is the power of God for our salvation. Only when we encounter the living Jesus do we receive a new life. Because God is the God of the living. I also still remember, when I first experienced Jesus personally through Romans 10:9, "If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." I was then prompted by the spirit of God and confessed Jesus as Lord. It was from since then that the lord gave me confidence to believe in His salvation work over my life. My love for the word of God grew, and by God's grace, his word had authority over me on how I should live. I believe God started a new life trajectory in my existence. That new path led me to a new a meaning and purpose in life. To struggle to serve and live for God. Though a worthless sinner with many weaknesses, today I am a campus bible teacher and have been granted the privilege to deliver Sunday messages and lead a small fellowship. The Lord is using this sinner to participate in his wonderful and eternal redemptive work. I am thankful to Jesus who called me personally, to give me life and life in full.

Jesus said in John 11:25, "...I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die". My sinful body and heart does not make it easy for me to live purely for God, however I am thankful that I have encountered Jesus personally who by the power of God will raise me to life one day. I really pray our Lord comes soon so that we no longer have to struggle with sin but be fully free to enjoy God and bask in God's glory forever. May God have mercy on me not to rely on my human strength and human reasoning, but fully trust in the living God who

has all the power to help me live out his calling to serve campus students and others in this life. How can I grow and let alone even raise disciples for Jesus? Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not perfect, but because of they encountered the living God, God could walk with them, using them in His redemptive work. Today they are living, because God is their God, for he is the God of the living. This very God is my God and your God. May we trust in Him and have faith in His power that he will use us for his redemptive work no matter our weaknesses and impure hearts. And that one day we will meet Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and many others whom God had called.

In conclusion, our God is not the legendary dead God who had lived long ago and who is no longer living. Our God is the living God now. He is still working powerfully today. When we believe this living God we also become living people. In the living God, our cold dead heart will become hot living heart. In the living God, our dead spirit will be alive and become passionate living spirit. I pray that we may all live by faith in the living God who raises the dead to life. Amen.