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Sermon Summary #36

Will There Be Sex In Heaven? Mark 12:18-27

A recent poll conducted by the Barna Institute indicates that in spite of the increasingly materialistic and naturalistic mood of our society, most people still believe in some form of life after death. The statistics are actually quite stunning. More than **80%** of Americans believe in an afterlife of some sort. Another 9% said life after death may exist, but they weren't certain. In other words, *only about 1 in 10 Americans contend that there is no life after death.* 76% of those responding believe that heaven exists and 71% say the same thing about hell.

What was undoubtedly the most eye-opening statistic is that only $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1% actually think they will go to hell following their death. In other words, *the vast, vast majority of those who believe in life after death are convinced that they will end up in heaven, however heaven may be defined for them.*

They didn't have the luxury of conducting public opinion polls in the ancient world, but if they had they would have discovered that virtually everyone in every culture affirmed some concept of life beyond the grave. For example: the **Egyptians** . . . the **Greeks** . . . even many **American Indians** . . .

Of course not everyone today believes in life after death. And that was true in the ancient world as well. One such group that denied any notion of immortality or resurrection of the body was the **Sadducees**. The Sadducees and Pharisees were what we might call the Democrats and Republicans of the ancient world. They were two groups of deeply religious people who differed greatly on issues of both lifestyle and doctrine.

The Sadducees were not many in number. But they constituted the wealthy, aristocratic, ruling class. Most of the chief priests were Sadducees. They *collaborated* with the Roman government when it served their purposes. There a little like those Washington politicians who ignore their state and their party and strike back room deals with the other side if it serves their cause.

They had an interesting view of the Old Testament. They refused to accept the oral traditions of the Pharisees and acknowledged only the Pentateuch, the first five books of the OT, as inspired Scripture. They rejected all the historical books, the prophets, as well as the poetic literature such as the Psalms.

The one thing that most set them apart, however, was their adamant denial of life after death.

Up until the time of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the previous Monday, the Sadducees had not shown a great deal of interest in Jesus or his message. In fact, they were probably quite happy to hear about his repeated denunciations of the Pharisees, their rivals. They watched and listened from a distance, giggling under their breaths: "Boy, that guy from Nazareth just nailed them again!"

But everything changed when Jesus entered the Temple and began to disrupt the merchants by turning over the tables and declaring God's judgment on those who were trying to make a profit from selling sacrificial animals. The reason is simple: the Sadducees were in charge of the Temple concessions! This was their party. The Temple was their gig. Jesus was cutting into their profits. Their wealth was largely obtained from the commissions they charged on the sale of animals and other items associated with Passover. Jesus has now invaded their territory. Jesus was little more than a blip on their radar screen until he hit them where it mattered most: their bank accounts! They could tolerate, and perhaps even enjoy, Jesus' volatile encounters with the Pharisees. But when he disrupted their operations during Passover, the most financially lucrative time of the year, they launched a counter assault.

They had no doubt watched and listened as Jesus repeatedly made fools of the Pharisees. They were determined to succeed where their religious rivals had failed. So they conjured up what they thought was a trick question, hoping to publicly humiliate Jesus and dispose of him for good. See vv. 18-23 . . .

Their question was based on the OT custom known as **Levirate Law**. According to Levirate Law, if a man were to die without having any children, his brother was obligated to marry the widow, his sister-in-law, and raise up children in his deceased brother's name. See Deut. 25:5-10 . . .

The Sadducees concoct an obviously hypothetical scenario in which the law of the Levirate is followed seven times. No doubt smirking and laughing under their breath, probably with a gleam of revenge in their eyes, they ask the question: "In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife" (v. 23). They were no doubt thinking to themselves: "If all eight of these people appear in the afterlife in the same condition or circumstances as on earth, how can their marriage relationships ever be reconciled?"

In other words, if the woman is to be the wife of all seven men simultaneously, that would violate numerous biblical laws and especially the law against incest. And if only one of the men is arbitrarily designated as her husband in heaven, which one will it be, and why? *They are trying to make the point that the entire notion of resurrection and the afterlife is absurd.*

Our Lord's response in v. 24, if uttered today, might sound something like this: "You dummies! You chowderheads! In the first place, you've denied the clear teaching of Scripture concerning the resurrection. You claim to be scholars of the Word but are utterly ignorant of what it says. And if you really understood the Scriptures you would know that God is infinite in power and perfectly capable of raising the dead to an existence quite unlike this present one. You have wrongly assumed that if there is an afterlife it will be identical to the here-and-now. Don't you realize that God is omnipotent and will radically transform and transfigure the conditions of our existence in the age to come?"

Read v. 25, and let's be sure we take note of **what Jesus is not** saying:

(1) He is not saying that there will be no memory of earthly existence and our relationships here. Much of heavenly life will be spent reflecting on the life we are now living as we are enabled by God to see the beauty of his redemptive and gracious work.

(2) Jesus does not mean that we will lack bodies in heaven. A great misconception is that the redeemed of God will spend eternity in some bodiless, ghost-like existence. See Romans 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:35-49; Phil. 3:20-21. When Jesus says we will be "like angels in heaven" he does not mean we will be ephemeral spirits without physical bodies but that **we will not experience death or marriage** there. The angels don't die and the angels don't get married. When we get to heaven, neither will we (cf. Luke 20:36).

(3) Jesus isn't saying that in heaven we will lose our sexual identity as male and female. If you are a male now you will be a male forever. If you are a female now you will be a female forever. When we receive our resurrection bodies we don't get de-sexed or neutered. Remember that Jesus was still a man after his resurrection. On Easter morning he was mistaken for a gardener or groundskeeper, a distinctly male occupation in the first century. And when Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration they were still men.

Some point to Romans 8:29, where Paul says we will be conformed to the image of Christ, and argue that everyone will be male in heaven. Not to worry ladies! The conformity to Christ in view here is *moral*, and refers to the fact that our nature or character will be like him and thus lacking in sin or corruption.

Sexual identity as male and female is foundational to our personality as created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). There is no such thing as a *neuter* human being. So, when the question is asked, "Will there be sex in heaven," if you mean **sex as a point of identity**, the answer is **Yes**. I will always be a male and retain those characteristics of personality associated with maleness. And women will always be female and retain those characteristics of personality associated with being feminine.

So what, then, did Jesus mean by this?

We need to remember that marriage has primarily a two-fold purpose: procreation and partnership, or fruitfulness and fellowship, or children and companionship. This is what Jesus says will end in heaven.

(1) Marriage as an institution around which human life is organized will cease in heaven. Marriage as the

social fabric or foundational unit of a society will end.

(2) Marriage as the means for procreation and the propagation of the human species will end. In heaven we will be like the angels, which is to say we will be immortal and incapable of dying. There is no need to procreate.

(3) Marriage as the primary context for fellowship, intimacy, and love will end. Now, on earth, it is in marriage that we experience to the highest degree the joy of interpersonal fellowship, love, sharing, growth, nurturing, and spiritual fellowship.

In heaven all these things will continue: in fact they will be expanded and intensified beyond our wildest imagination. Jesus isn't saying that love will end in heaven. Quite the opposite. The love that on earth could best be achieved in a marriage relationship between husband and wife will be **so marvelously magnified** that all of God's people will experience it jointly. That woman in the story the Sadducees told will be able to love her seven husbands perfectly as they in turn will all love her perfectly, but none of them will live or love in the state of marriage.

Jesus is not saying you will love your earthly husband/wife less once you get to heaven, or that the relationships you now have will be obliterated or annulled then, but that what you experience now with but one person you will experience then to an infinitely higher degree with all of God's people.

“OK, Sam, get to the point! Answer the question: Will there be sex in heaven?”

Some of you think that even to ask such a question is inappropriate and in poor taste. Some of you think that I asked the question in the title of this message just to get a few laughs out of you. All of you are wrong. If you are bothered by the question, I suggest you have a less than biblical perspective on the subject. Let's not forget that this is in essence what the Sadducees were asking. But if we are going to answer it we must define what we mean by the word “sex”.

- Sex as **identity / gender** will always remain, for eternity.
- Sex as an **attitude, or sexuality**, will always remain; we will always recognize and appreciate and enjoy the beauty of the differences between male and female. Sexual passion, per se, is not sinful. Adam and Eve experienced sexual passion and desire **before** the fall into sin. There is no reason to think that sexual attraction will be absent from heaven, but it will most certainly **not** be characterized by lust or perversion or desire for illicit activity.
- Sex as a **physical activity** is meant only for this life.

I can assure you of this: ***whatever physical or sensual pleasures one experiences in this life through sexual intimacy will be magnified and intensified apart from sexual intercourse in the next life.*** I don't know how God will do it, but I'm convinced that the joys of heaven, the happiness and pleasures of heaven, will infinitely exceed those on earth. Jonathan Edwards put it best:

“[In heaven] the glorified spiritual bodies of the saints shall be filled with pleasures of the most exquisite kind that such refined bodies are capable of. . . . The sweetness and pleasure that shall be in the mind, shall put the spirits of the body into such a motion as shall cause a sweet sensation throughout the body, infinitely excelling any sensual pleasure here” (Jonathan Edwards, Miscellany 233: Yale Works, 13:351).

So, regardless of how I answer the question, you won't be disappointed when you get there!

You will be deprived of nothing in heaven that is essential to your optimum happiness. The problem is that you and I are very much like the Sadducees: we think heaven is going to be like earth, we think the next life is going to be precisely like this one. We mistakenly assume that the way in which we experience both physical and spiritual pleasures now is the limit for how we will experience them then. And Jesus says to you and me, “You are ignorant, and know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God!”

But let's not lose sight of what the **real question** is that the Sadducees have posed to Jesus. The real question isn't whether or not there will be sex after death but whether or not there will be **life** after death. Is there a

resurrection to life? Yes, says Jesus, and here is his proof. Read vv. 26-27 . . .

Jesus quotes directly from **Exodus 3:6** and the account of the burning bush. Note that Jesus uses for his proof text a passage from the Pentateuch, that one portion of the OT the Sadducees recognized as inspired and authoritative!

Many believe the emphasis should be placed on the present tense verb, “I *am* the God of Abraham . . .” The point would then be, “If God **IS** the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even when addressing Moses hundreds of years after those three patriarchs had died, then they must be alive to him. In other words, ***the living God is the God of living men!***”

But perhaps the key word here isn’t the word “is” but the preposition “**of**”. “I am the God **of** Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” That is to say, I have committed myself to them and they are mine. God is saying: “I established a relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a covenant to which I pledged myself. I promised these men and their believing posterity blessings that are eternal. I promised to love them and care for them and provide for them forever. I am, therefore, the God **OF** Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even as I declared to Moses.”

The fact of God’s covenant commitment to these men (and to all believers) requires that they live in resurrection power beyond death in order to receive what was promised. Could the living, saving, covenant-keeping God establish a relationship with these men only to allow it to be terminated by their deaths? No.

To be “the God of” such men implies an on-going, caring, protecting, helping, saving relationship which is as permanent as the loving God who makes it. If Abraham or Isaac or Jacob did not continue to exist after their earthly deaths, then the promises of God to them are empty and void and God is a liar. God’s fidelity to the covenant requires that he raise the dead. God will raise the dead because he cannot fail to keep his promises to them that he will be their God and they will be his people.

In conclusion, the question is not whether **sex** will be in heaven, but whether **you** will be in heaven! All mankind will be raised from the dead to live eternally (John 5:25-29). The only question is whether that eternal existence will be in heaven, in the presence of God, or in hell, utterly separated and alone and isolated from everyone and everything.

The Sadducees were very religious people who didn’t believe in an afterlife, which makes absolutely no sense to me whatsoever. The question I would have loved to ask them is simply this: ***If there is no afterlife, why be religious?*** If there is no afterlife, why not live like Charlie Sheen? If the Sadducees are right, if there’s no resurrection, fornicate as much as you can, do as many drugs as you can, steal as much money as you can get away with, make adultery and the pursuit of power your ambition. If the Sadducees are right, then eat, drink, and be merry, for after you die there is **nothing!**

If there is nothing beyond the grave, then nothing in this life ultimately matters. If there is nothing beyond the grave then so-called categories of “good” and “evil” are little more than personal preferences, likes and dislikes. If there is no afterlife, the only thing that matters now is whatever feels good. So, if the Sadducees are right, sleep with as many as you can, steal as much as you can, exploit everyone for monetary gain and glory, lie whenever it advances your cause, live solely for yourself, immerse yourself in every imaginable sinful activity, because after you die . . . **nothing!**

But if Jesus is right, and there is a heaven of infinite beauty and bliss and joy, trust him to get you there. If Jesus is right, and the Sadducees are wrong, cast your hope on his death for sinners and his resurrection from the dead.

Put aside your concerns for the question in my title and ask yourself an infinitely more important one – “Am I prepared for death? Have I, by faith, laid hold of Jesus Christ and his work on the cross in dying for my sins as the only hope for my eternal forgiveness and eternal joy?”