

It is so right in our human experience to celebrate life. It's what we do. It's how we're wired. On the other side of our earthly human experience, we're compelled to celebrate life and mourn the loss. When someone passes from this life into the afterlife, there's this innate belief in most of us about the afterlife, about life after death.

Just think about a quick review of history. It shows that man has always had a hope of living beyond the grave. For example, the ancient Book of the Dead is full of tales of life after death. The tomb of Pharaoh Cheops, who died some 5,000 years ago, contained a boat that was designed to carry him through the heavens for eternity. The ancient Greeks were often buried with a coin in their mouths to pay their fare to cross the River Styx into the land of the dead.

Some Native Americans were buried with their bows, arrows, and their ponies so that they would be ready to hunt when they arrived at the eternal hunting ground. The ancient Vikings believed in a place called Valhalla, where they would fight all day then the dead would be raised and the wounded healed every evening. They would feast and drink together, and then they would fight again the next day.

The Muslims look forward to their version of paradise where physical pleasure can be indulged throughout eternity. The ancient Jews were no exception. They also believed in life after death. Their Talmud, their commentary, which contained their written and oral traditions, were filled with references to life after death. Life after death is the issue that confronts us in these verses in Mark. When the Pharisees and the Herodians had failed, as we've seen in Mark, to trap Jesus in his words, another religious Jewish group wanted to try to stump him, to trap him.

As we study these verses, we will consider some questions about life after death because Jesus will answer these three questions in our text this morning. What will the afterlife be like? What will we be like when we get there? What will our relationships be with one another?

So let's consider the text. What did the Jews believe about the resurrection? Well, a large majority of the Jews always believed in a resurrection. The Old Testament is very clear about life after death. We won't put this on the screen but just listen to these words from the Psalms.

**"Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay." Psalm. 16:9-10**

The important thing to notice is that David had this confidence that when he died, he wouldn't be stuck in the realm of the dead. And when we get to the New Testament, we see that this Psalm is messianic. It describes Jesus' experience. He also was not abandoned to the grave, and he wasn't in the grave long enough to decay. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 73:24, "*You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.*" Psalm 49:15 is another Psalm referring to Jesus. "*But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself.*"

Jesus died to pay the price to redeem us from our sins, a price we couldn't pay. We couldn't pay that price to free ourselves from the power of the grave so that we could be brought home to heaven. Job gives us a glimpse of our future life after death. It's not just existing spiritually, but eventually; we will continue to exist in a physical body as Jesus was bodily raised from the dead for all eternity. "*And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;*" (Job 19:26). So life after death and the resurrection of the body is clearly spelled out in the Old Testament, and that's an important background for us because today we're going to meet this group called the Sadducees, which did not believe what the majority of Jews believed.

I love how Dr. Kurt Trucksess, who founded an organization called Christ 2R Culture, outlined these verses, and I was just inspired as I was studying what he was doing. I found his outline and insights so powerful, and I want to make sure I gave him credit.

Mark 12:18 says this, *“Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.”* Who are these Sadducees, and what do they believe? Well, this is the only appearance of this group in the Gospel of Mark. The Sadducees, along with the Pharisees, which you’ve heard about, along with the scribes, which we’ve talked about, made up the Sanhedrin. They were small in number but very powerful in Jerusalem. Scholars say that it was actually the Sadducees who controlled the temple. They ran the temple, and in fact, when the Roman armies came in AD 70 and destroyed Jerusalem, the Sadducees were never heard from again.

Acts 23:8 describes their beliefs. *“(The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)”* So the Sadducees denied the resurrection. They denied the existence of angels and the spirit world. They believe that when you die, you will just cease to exist.

So we have to ask, how did they come up with these strange beliefs when so much of the Bible teaches the resurrection of the dead? They only accepted the first five books of The Tanakh. That’s the first five books in the Old Testament. They only believe in the Pentateuch, which is made up of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Penta means five. That was their small Bible, and historians record that the Pharisees and the Sadducees continued to debate back and forth the resurrection, the afterlife, and angels from the text of the Pentateuch. So the Sadducees were entrenched; they were unwilling to believe anything beyond what they could interpret out of those five books.

Now the Pharisees, who we’ve talked about at great length in the Mark study, believed in the resurrection and that everyone rose from the dead. They rose from the dead, looking exactly the same way they looked when they died. Isn’t that a pleasant thought? So if you have a mole on your arm on earth, you will have a mole on your arm for eternity. If you were married to someone in this life, they believed that you would be married to that same person in the next life. Some of you were thinking, “Oh my goodness, is that true?”

This was speculation by the Pharisees. The Bible doesn’t say anything about this, as we will find out. This is the background we need to understand the trap that the Sadducees tried to set for Jesus. They were trying to make Jesus look foolish by proving that the resurrection was wrong. Here’s what they said in verse 19.

**“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.” Mark 12:19**

The Sadducees tried to trap Jesus from Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Bible. So let’s look back. This is where they get this

**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. Deut. 25:5**

What they’re referring to is something called the Levirate Law, which is Latin for brother-in-law marriage. In their attempt to disprove the resurrection, they go to Deuteronomy 25, which talks about this law. If a man died and he and his surviving wife had no child, his wife was supposed to marry her deceased husband’s brother. Why? So she could have a child through someone in the family in order to continue the family line and keep the inheritance in the family. The idea was that a widow might leave and marry someone outside the family. If she had a son outside the family, the inheritance would leave the family. The idea was that in the Old Testament, when property really mattered, this farmland needed to stay in the family, and this law was a way of doing that.

So the Sadducees make up this really weird, virtually impossible scenario in their attempt to prove that the resurrection couldn’t be true and embarrass Jesus. This is probably an argument that the Pharisees and the Sadducees had amongst themselves. The Pharisees couldn’t answer it, so they are going to spring it on Jesus.

**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?” Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? Mark 12:20-24**

The first thing you should notice about this passage is that this woman didn’t have very good luck with men! And if I was the seventh brother, I’d be pretty nervous after my sixth brother died at this point. But the Sadducees were not drawing their understanding

of the resurrection from the Bible but from the speculation in the commentary of the Pharisees. They said, "You will be raised, and it will be just like it was on earth and married to the same person." Who would you be married to in heaven if you had seven brothers for one bride?

Then the Sadducees made their point. "Which of the seven brothers would the woman be married to? Tell us, Rabbi. Jesus, how would you answer this?" Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God?" Just set it straight. He was saying that the problem here was not him; it was with them. They looked foolish because they didn't understand two essential things. They didn't understand their Bible or the power of God. The word Jesus used for error is *planásthe*, where we get the word *planet* from. He's saying they were so far off it's as if they were on another planet.

So Jesus gives them proof that they don't know the scriptures and the power of God. But he answers them in reverse order. First, regarding the power of God, he confronts their denial of the resurrection. The resurrection will be much more than just the continuation of this life. "*When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven*" (Mark 12:25).

Jesus is saying that when people rise from the dead, they won't be married. In heaven, there won't be people getting married. What Jesus was doing here was pointing out that this idea of sex, reproduction, birthing children, and having families was not intended for our resurrected life. And he goes on to explain what we will be like after the resurrection. He says we'll be like the angels. He doesn't say we will be angels, but we will be like angels. And he adds this for the Sadducees who didn't believe in angels.

So what does it mean to be like angels? Angels are created beings, created to serve. They're known for their power, God's power, working through them. They're known for glory, beauty, and brightness, and angels exist forever. They don't die. They don't reproduce. Remember, the Pharisees thought that the resurrected life would be just like on earth, moles and marriage. So Jesus said, the resurrected life will be like this life in many ways, but vastly improved in every way.

I love how Paul expands on this to help us understand the resurrected life.

**However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things**

## **God has prepared for those who love him— 1 Corinthians. 2:9**

We try to imagine how wonderful our resurrected lives will be and how powerful our resurrected bodies will be, but we can't fully imagine that. It's like my two-month-old granddaughter, Gianna, trying to imagine the experience of diving into a swimming pool or imagining the beauty of Yosemite. We can imagine it, but she can't imagine it at this point.

The beauty of the resurrected life is beyond our ability to comprehend, and this is why the hope of the resurrection is our greatest hope. This life is not all there is to life. When we die, none of us, Jesus is saying, will cease to exist. Christians will leave their earthly bodies and go immediately to be with Christ. Paul describes this as better by far. Then one day, the scriptures teach, Jesus will return and raise those bodies from the grave of those who put their faith in Christ while they lived on earth, and the Lord will bring those bodies back. Our bodies will be changed at that time for all eternity, our spirit and our body united.

Those who die apart from Christ, without putting their faith in Christ, will go to a place called Hades, and one day Christ will also resurrect their bodies. He will reunite their spirits with their bodies, and they will face judgment before the throne of God. So the scripture is clear. Nobody ceases to exist after death. For those who put their trust in Christ on earth, this will be the best thing that ever happened.

You know, the 4th of July was a really good day for the Reid family. We were gathered in Wisconsin. It was a day when our two married daughters and their husbands and their kids got together. For the first time, these grandkids and these cousins got together. It was a good day. And you're asking, how could it be better than this? I mean, we had brats, boats, family, and fireworks. We had all of it. It was just beautiful.

But you know your family, and I know my family, and things aren't perfect. Our family struggles just like your family. Every one of us. Relationship struggles, forgiveness and reconciliation, and life change are necessary for everyone in every family. There's a shadow side because we live on earth, and every one of us, from time to time, struggles in relationships. Every one of us recognizes the need to offer forgiveness, the need to accept forgiveness. Every one of us needs to be honest and clear communicators and listeners. Every one of us needs to believe and trust God that life transformation is possible through a relationship with Jesus Christ.



No matter how young you are, no matter how old you are, every one of us needs to be reminded that prayer works in our families. There may be things that you struggle with this morning when you contemplate the resurrection. Maybe it's hard for some of us to comprehend if you're in an exceptionally wonderful marriage. There's joy, satisfaction, and intimacy with your spouse in marriage on earth. And I think being in heaven could trouble some of us because in heaven, marriage no longer exists, and you're thinking, "How could I be happy without marriage?" We don't have time today to explain in detail. The purpose of marriage in this life is as God laid it out and all the joys that God designed marriage was designed to give. But recognize this—marriage was designed by God to whet our appetites for the closeness and satisfaction that we will experience with Jesus in our resurrected bodies in the next life. To kind of summarize here, marriage is an earthly institution. It's designed to provide companionship, to fulfill the need for intimacy, to produce children, and none of this will be necessary in heaven.

Four hundred years ago, John Penny sat in a dungeon in the Tower of London because he had been preaching the gospel. He was awaiting his execution because it was illegal in England at that time. The day before his execution, he wrote a letter to his wife and signed it this way: 'Husband for a season, and your eternal brother.'

So life truly will be different in heaven. We don't become angels, but we're going to be like angels in the sense that we will be sinless, glorified, and eternal. Like angels, we will obey completely and will worship with our whole hearts. And, like angels, we will enjoy an existence that transcends earthly limitations. We will no longer have babies. We will no longer hunger or thirst. We will not experience pain. We will no longer sin. I like how Warren Wiersbe said it. "Resurrection is not the restoration of life as we know it; it is the entrance into a new life that is different." Heaven will be a completely different dimension than the life that we know now.

Weddings will not be performed because we will be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb as ascribed in Revelation. We will certainly remember and know and be intimate with our spouse and our friends and with our family. But every relationship that we'll have will pale in comparison to the relationship that we'll have with Jesus. Any relationship that we had on earth will be so much richer and deeper when

we're in heaven. No more sickness, no more sorrow, no more suffering or sin. Revelation 21:4 says, "*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*" In 1 Corinthians 15:50, Paul describes the resurrection in detail. "*I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*" With new bodies and new minds, we will be reunited with other believers who have died before us. And people will be able to tell that it's you, and you'll be able to recognize them, only perfected and glorified.

I love the picture of Moses and Elijah, who were recognized on the Mount of Transfiguration by Jesus and by the inner circle of the disciples. Remember, our infinitely creative God—who created everything in this world, all the fish, birds, sunsets, plants, everything all in six days—will outdo himself in the new creation, making it far better than the original creation. Everything about God's resurrection will be a thousand times better than the good things we experience in this life, even a July 4th celebration with family!

So the Sadducees and the Pharisees were massively misunderstanding the power of God, and Paul gives a wonderful illustration. I hope this helps us understand the power of God shown through the resurrection.

**But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. 1 Corinthians 15:35-38**

Paul is saying that dying and being buried as a Christian is like planting a seed. As we were back in the Midwest, farmers all over the Midwest planted corn seeds in the ground in the past spring. But what comes out is not another seed. What comes out is a corn plant. That is vastly larger and better and more amazing than the dry kernel that they planted in the ground. That's what Paul's getting at here. What went into the ground was moles and marriage, and what comes out of the ground will be resurrected bodies.

What Jesus is telling the Sadducees, and he's telling us today, is that the resurrection is unleashing the power of God. He also exposes that the Sadducees didn't even believe their own smaller Bible.

**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'? Mark 12:26**

He's taking them back to Exodus 3:6 and the account of the burning bush. *"Then he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.'* At this, Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God." As clear as it can be, God is saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God, through Moses.' He did not say; I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as if they ceased to exist. In Exodus, Moses writes this verse in ancient Hebrew, in the present tense, not in the past tense. Even though these three patriarchs died long before Moses and the burning bush happened, God reveals to Moses that they're not dead, that they're alive, and they're with him—right from their Pentateuch, the second book.

When God calls someone into a relationship with him, that relationship continues not for just this life but also into the next life through death and into eternity in heaven. Look how Jesus finishes it in verse 27. *"He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"*

That's Jesus's final word to the Sadducees. Then the Sadducees drift away and become just a little footnote in history. So in their attempt to make him look foolish, Jesus makes them look foolish by proving that they underestimated the power of God and what he will do to our resurrected bodies. But also, he makes them foolish by showing that even in their smaller Bibles, there is evidence of life after death clearly spelled out, and they refuse to accept it.

He's showing us that God is the God of the living, not the God of the dead and that Jesus is the Lord and Savior of the living. So I want to encourage us with this, our God is the God of the living, and his promise of resurrection for those who trust in him is sure and certain.

Those we love within our church family will face various seasons, ups and downs, mountaintops, and valleys. There are always people within our church family that continue to struggle with challenges of all kinds—sickness and death of loved ones, broken relationships, marriage, parenting, an attraction that pulls toward the kingdoms of this world, the flat-out temptations of the flesh, and the lies and the harassment from Satan which is also very real and so hard.

As we seek to follow Jesus in this broken and sinful world as Christians, sometimes we need to step back and remember that the promise of the resurrection is what gets us through the crises we face in this life. We persevere following Jesus in this life, even when life is hard, when we are faced with suffering loss in this life, the death of a loved one, or our own imminent death. In this life, it's the hope of the resurrection that we can stand on. That's our cornerstone to get through it and to get through it with confidence. Our resurrected bodies will be better than we could ever imagine. Our resurrected relationships will be better than we could ever imagine. Our resurrected relationship with Christ will be better than we could ever imagine.

So what do we learn from all this good news that Jesus is giving us here? Where does our encouragement come from this morning? As we lift it from the text, it comes from Jesus and the word of God. As Jesus challenged the Sadducees about their lack of understanding of the scriptures, may we receive this challenge this morning to know our scriptures more and more so that we are not like the Sadducees who underestimated the power of God. May we not underestimate the power of God, and may we receive this challenge to pray bold prayers, to ask God to transform, to ask God to give you the faith and the strength of his grace, to trust him in those spaces of your life where you know you haven't invited God in to clean up those spaces, to say this is enough of my life without Christ on the throne. I need him in there. Welcome him in and ask him to work in all areas of your life.

I'd like us all to spend some time reflecting. I was writing out some prayers that I have for our church family. Maybe some of these will resonate with you. My prayer is that you believe in the power of God to take the sting out of death and to bring you real hope and peace as you walk through the valley of the shadow of death today.

For others, my prayer is for you to believe in the power of God to bring healing to your present affliction, whatever it is that you carry right now. For others, my prayer is for you to believe in the power of God to bring hope into the despair that you may be feeling. For others, my prayer is that you believe in the power of God to guide you when you feel lost and don't know what to do, and you're ready to give up.

For others, my prayer is that you believe in the power of God to save and forgive you. That he is powerful

enough to forgive even the worst of sins you've committed, and then to give you the gift of salvation and offer you, Jesus Christ, as your Savior, and have a real relationship with him. Only the power of God can accomplish that.

God, thank you for your love. Thank you for your Word. Thank you for your power to transform lives. Thank you for heaven. Thank you for your power to save and defeat death. Fill us, Lord, with your Spirit. May your power flow through us. May your truth found in God's Word truly shape us and prepare us all. Lord, whatever is ahead, we follow your leading in our lives. We pray all this in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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