

Mark 12:18-44 ~ Scripture Verses

Marriage at the Resurrection

¹⁸ Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 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 have children for his brother. ²⁰ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. ²¹ The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. ²² In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. ²³ At the resurrection [a] whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

²⁴ Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? ²⁵ When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ²⁶ Now about the dead rising— have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’ [b]? ²⁷ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”

The Greatest Commandment

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. [c] ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ [d] ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ [e] There is no commandment greater than these.”

³² “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Whose Son Is the Christ?

³⁵ While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ [f] is the son of David? ³⁶ David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

“‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’” [g]

³⁷ David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”

The large crowd listened to him with delight.

³⁸ As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.

⁴⁰ They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.”

The Widow’s Offering

⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.

⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

Footnotes:

- a. 12:23 – Some manuscripts: resurrection, when men rise from the dead,
- b. 12:26 – Exodus 3:6
- c. 12:29 – Or the Lord our God is one Lord
- d. 12:30 – Deut. 6:4,5
- e. 12:31 – Lev. 19:18
- f. 12:35 – Or Messiah
- g. 12:36 – Psalm 110:1

Mark 12:18-44 ~ Discussion Questions

<i>Heading, Verses</i>	<i>Main Point(s)</i>
Marriage at the resurrection (12:18-27)	
The greatest commandment (12:28-34)	
Whose son is the Christ (12:35-37)	
Jewish teachers of the law (12:38-40)	
The widow's offering (12:41-44)	

1. In what *two* ways were the Sadducees in error? (12:24-27)

2. What did Jesus mean when he referred to God as “not the God of the dead, but of the living?” What difference does that make to you? (12:27, Ephesians 2:4-5)

3. How can we know who is right when we hear conflicting opinions about God, the Bible, or theology? How can you benefit from the insight of another believer?

4. Jesus was asked to single out the most important commandment. Instead, he cited two commandments, which he quoted from OT scripture (Deut 6:4-5, Lev 19:18), but not from the ten commandments. Explain.

5. The teacher added a note about “offerings and sacrifices” to Jesus’ answer. Why? What do they have to do with the commandments? How did Jesus respond?

6. Answering a rhetorical question about Christ being the son of David in 12:35, Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1. How do you interpret his answer in 12:36-37?

7. Explain how Jewish teachers “devour widow’s houses” in 12:40. What people in our society today are vulnerable to exploitation?

8. What do Christians do that is like these Jewish teachers? How does pride interfere with your Christian witness? Are you ever showy about your faith?

9. How does God evaluate your giving? Why do you think God wants us to give sacrificially? What attitude should we have about giving of ourselves to the Lord?

Mark 12:18-44 ~ Leader's Guide

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1. In what *two* ways were the Sadducees in error? (12:24-27)

Jesus said they were wrong in two ways. First, because people will not marry in heaven. Jesus says they will be like angels, which Robert Friedman in *Commentary on the Torah* says “are conceived as expressions of God’s presence (Gen 18:3, etc.) . Since God cannot be seen by a human and live (Exod 33:20) and cannot be contained in any known space (1 Kings 8:27), God can, nonetheless make himself known to humans by a sort of emanation from the Godhead that is visible to human eyes. It is a concrete expression of the divine presence, which is otherwise inexpressible to human beings. What the human sees looks like ‘people’ or a ‘man,’ and the word for such a thing is ‘angel.’ ” Not to get off on a tangent, but it’s interesting to note that Jesus says that those who go to heaven will be ‘like’ angels, *not* will be angels.

The second, and significantly more serious error, is not believing in the resurrection at all. The Sadducees were a relatively small but wealthy and powerful Jewish sect located largely in Jerusalem that administered the temple and had a powerful political and religious influence. They accepted only the first five books of Moses as authoritative, which set them against the Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, and the common Jewish piety.

2. What did Jesus mean when he referred to God as “not the God of the dead, but of the living?” What difference does that make to you? (12:27, Ephesians 2:4-5)

In this particular instance, Jesus was most likely referring to our life after the resurrection, as he specifically says “when the dead rise...” (12:25) However, he may also have been speaking of what Paul refers to in several places as living in Christ. Ephesians 2:4-5 – ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in

mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. Or Galatians 2:20 – I have died, but Christ lives in me. And I now live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me.

3. How can we know who is right when we hear conflicting opinions about God, the Bible, or theology? How can you benefit from the insight of another believer?

Federal agents don't learn to spot counterfeit currency by studying forgeries. They study genuine bills until they master the look and feel of the real thing. Then when they see or handle bogus money they recognize it. The same applies to reading the Bible and hearing God's word. You have to read it over and over and study it. Then when you read or hear something incorrect, you can recognize it.

Unfortunately, there are instances, especially of interpretation where even the experts differ in their opinion of the meaning of a passage. The recent parable of the tenants, for example, has four different possible interpretations: 1) use your gifts to help the poor, 2) submit to Jesus' rule and you will bear much fruit, 3) we are called to care for the Church, and 4) show respect to God who owns it all. The scripture supports all four interpretations so in this case you must decide which is the most meaningful in your life.

Another example: a Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14 is interpreted by Jews and many Christians as "young woman." Other Christians point at Matthew 1:23 and say the correct interpretation is the later Greek word, "virgin." People fight fiercely over this verse. Was Isaiah's prophecy referring to Abijah, daughter of Zechariah and the royal bride of Ahaz. Or did it refer to the virgin Mary giving birth to Jesus? At the risk of losing my Bible study leader's license, my opinion is that with nearly 100 unambiguous OT prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus, one more or less doesn't matter that much. Whether the verse referred to Abijah or Mary does not affect my faith in Jesus as my Lord and savior.

My last question asks if you can benefit from discussing things with another believer. Personally, I strongly believe that Biblical understanding can be greatly enhanced by discussing the Bible and your beliefs with others.

4. Jesus was asked to single out the most important commandment. Instead, he cited two commandments, which he quoted from OT scripture (Deut 6:4-5, Lev 19:18), but not from the ten commandments. Explain.

Deut 6:4-5 – Hear, Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your being and with all your might. [Robert Alter Jewish translation. Also following comments.]

v 4. *Hear, Israel.* This entire passage, through to verse 9, has been aptly described as a catechism, and it entirely fits its character as an exhortation to hew to God's teachings that it later should have been incorporated in the daily liturgy, recited

twice each day in Jewish worship. These verses are known as the *Shema*.

v. 5. *And you shall love the LORD your God.* It is a new emphasis of Deuteronomy to add to the traditional fear of the LORD the emotion of love, perhaps in an effort to deepen psychologically the conception of monotheism. Ibn Ezra says, “Since we have no other god but only Him alone, you have to love Him, for we have no other god.”

with all your heart. The heart is the seat of understanding, perception, reason, and memory in biblical physiology, but it is also associated with feelings.

with all your being. The Hebrew *nefesh* means “life-breath” or “essential self.” The traditional translation of “soul,” found in many recent versions, is misleading because it suggests a body-soul split alien to biblical thinking.

In addition to loving the LORD, Jesus added that we must also love our fellow man. Richard Friedman in *Commentary on the Torah* makes an interesting observation that Leviticus is pervaded with the notion of distinction (between priest and lay person, between Israel and other countries, between pure and impure, between good and bad, between permitted and forbidden, etc) yet it includes one exception to this pervasive idea of differentiating, which, ironically, is perhaps the most famous line in the book, namely: “Love your neighbor as yourself!” Besides everything else that is impressive about this instruction, it stands out as anomalous in a book that so regularly makes distinctions. In relations with one’s fellow human beings, one is commanded instead to *equate* them—to oneself, and by necessary implication, to one another. Thus, the people of Israel were commanded to love all people: family, friends, members of their community and nation, but also foreigners and aliens, and oneself as well.

In a sense, these two commands include all that is in the ten commandments (loving the Lord is essentially Commandments 1-4 and loving others is Commandments 5-10) but the statement is actually much broader than that and encompasses, in a sense, nearly the entire Bible.

5. The teacher added a note about “offerings and sacrifices” to Jesus’ answer. Why? What do they have to do with the commandments? How did Jesus respond?

v. 33. *is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices;* that is, Jesus’ commands were more excellent in their nature, more acceptable to God, and more useful among men, than all the rituals of the ceremonial law, than any sacrifice whatever. This man had a different sense of things from many others who placed religion chiefly in the observance of the rituals of the law and the traditions of the elders. They neglected the duties of the moral law, regarding God and their neighbors: things which are preferred and to be attended to before any ceremonial institutions, and especially the inventions of men.

Jesus responded to the man that his understanding and wise answer placed him close to the kingdom of God.

6. Answering a rhetorical question about Christ being the son of David in 12:35, Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1. How do you interpret his answer in 12:36-37?

v. 36. *The Lord said to my Lord.* God said to David's Lord, i.e., David's superior—ultimately the Messiah. The purpose of the quotation was to show that the Messiah was more than a descendent of David—he was David's Lord. Unless Jesus' opponents were ready to admit that the Messiah was also the divine son of God, they could not answer Jesus' question in v. 37.

Christians have generally held the Psalm 110 is the most “prophetic” of all the psalms in which David, speaking prophetically composed a coronation psalm for his great future Son, of whom the prophets did not speak of until later. It may be, however, that David composed the psalm for the coronation of his son Solomon, that he called him “my Lord” (v. 1) in view of his new status, which placed him above the aged David, and that in so doing he spoke a word that had far larger meaning than he knew. This would seem to be in more accord with what we know of David from Samuel, Kings and Chronicles.

7. Explain how Jewish teachers “devour widow's houses” in 12:40. What people in our society today are vulnerable to exploitation?

Since the teachers of the law were not paid a regular wage, they were dependent upon the generosity of patrons for their livelihood. Such a system was open to abuses, and widows were especially vulnerable to exploitation.

When Jesus referred to “lengthy prayers” in v. 40, he was not necessarily condemning all long prayers, but meaningless verbiage in praying. In Matthew 6:7, Jesus said, “do not keep babbling like pagans,” which referred to pagans' using long lists of the names of gods in prayers, hoping that by constantly repeating them, they would call on the name of the god that could help them. We are also told not to make a show of praying—that doesn't mean not praying in public—but praying to be seen as pious in condemned.

8. What do Christians do that is like these Jewish teachers? How does pride interfere with your Christian witness? Are you ever showy about your faith?

9. How does God evaluate your giving? Why do you think God wants us to give sacrificially? What attitude should we have about giving of ourselves to the Lord?