THE GOD OF ABRAHAM

Mark 12:18-27

Key Verse: 12:26b

"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

In the last passage the Pharisees came to Jesus and asked him, "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (14) Jesus said in verse 17, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." Jesus' ans­wer taught them the basic duties to state and church. Christian faith is based on the fact that God gave his one and only Son as a ransom sacrifice. The Saddu­cees heard that the Pharisees failed terribly in trapping Jesus. They felt good, thinking they were supe­rior to the Phari­sees. They were more than sure they could trap Je­sus with a very sub­tle ques­tion and put him in deep trou­ble. Let's see what their ques­tion was and how Jesus helped them.

I. The inner motive of the Sadducees' denial of the resurrection (18-23)

According to Josephus the historian, the word "Sadducee" means "the righ­teous one." But in view of history, the Sadducees had never been "the righ­teous ones"; they were, in general, opportunists or sheer pragma­tists. The origin of the Sadducees is obscure. Probably Sadducees became a sect when the priesthood became increasingly pow­erful. At the time of Jesus, the peo­ple of Israel were suffering under the yoke of the Roman Empire. But the Sadducees were known as aristocrats. They were more interested in main­taining the status quo than in the religious purity of the nation. Sim­ply speaking, they were not godly people, but were political people. For exam­ple, they did not believe in the resurrection of the body (18). They also did not believe in any spiritual reali­ties, such as spirits, an­gels and the immor­tality of the soul. It is irony that the high priests' position had been occu­pied by atheistic Sadducees throughout many genera­tions. With the authority and power of high priests, they abused their power over the suffer­ing peo­ple.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection because they loved the world so much that they had no idea about the spiritual realities. More­over, the Sadducees did not believe in the resur­rection be­cause the Bible teach­es that everybody has to stand before the judg­ment seat of God after death (2Co 5:10). They really wanted to escape standing before the judgment seat of God. So they denied the resurrec­tion of the body doggedly. They were like little children who cover their eyes with their fingers and say, "There is no sky." The Sadducees did not like one of Je­sus' titles, "The Son of David," which indicated the coming Mes­siah who would die for the sin of the world and rise again on the third day. They came to Jesus to dis­credit him in the eyes of the people and get him in trouble with the Roman power as to the authority of Jesus (Mt 21:23) and as to the resurrec­tion of the body.

The Sadducees asked a question made up of a most sorrowful and gro­tesque story which goes as follows: "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. 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?" (19-23) The Saddu­cees, in making up a story, made use of the Jewish law of marriage (Dt 25:5-10). If many broth­ers lived together and one of them died and left no child, it was the duty of the next brother to take his brother's widow as his wife and to raise children for his dead brother so that his brother might have heirs to con­tinue his name and his property. The story about Judah and Tamar in Genesis is a good example of the Jewish tradition (Gen 38).

The gist of the Sadducees' question was, "At the resurrec­tion whose wife will she be, since the seven brothers were married to her?" The Saddu­cees thought that in asking such a question they had ren­dered the whole idea of the resurrection completely ridiculous. The Saddu­cees never be­lieved in the resurrec­tion. But they asked Jesus what would hap­pen at the resur­rec­tion by saying, "At the resurrection whose wife will she be?" (23) They are indeed con­tradictory people. The Sadducees' assumptive story is not accept­able. For in­stance, how can a woman, a human being, marry seven broth­ers unless she is made of steel? Even if she is made of steel, how could she change her emo­tional feelings like we change the cartridge of a printer, in order to marry seven times? The Saddu­cees never under­stood the integrity of a woman. Usually a woman marries one time. She never wants to marry again. In the Old Testa­ment Ruth, who said, "...if anything but death sepa­rates you and me" (Ru 1:17b), is a good illustration of a genuine wom­an. When we analyze their story, the Saddu­cees were peo­ple who could do any­thing to carry out their politi­cal in­trigue. May­be this is the reason people say, "politi­cians are first-class liars."

The Sadducees talked about the marriage problem because it was in the first place in their hearts. The Sadducees were excessively ob­sessed with grab­bing something in their hands. This is why they asked­, "Whose wife will she be?" They were always sick with the idea to grab some­thing in their hands.

What is worse, the Sadducees had the problem of death in their hearts, even though they did not know what it was. They were aristo­cratic peo­ple. They en­joyed luxuri­ous life and their political pow­er. So they wanted to live in this world forever and never die. But things did not go as they had expect­ed. The Sad­ducees ignored the spiritual realities completely. But they could not be an exception from the absolute of God that man is both body and spirit. For ex­am­ple, the president of a compa­ny who pos­sessed a 27-story building in­vit­ed his pastor to dinner. After the dinner he asked his pastor a question, "Is it good if I drink just one cup of wine before going to bed?" The presi­dent's wife, sitting next to him at the ta­ble, said sadly, "He wants to drink just one cup of wine, then just one more cup of wine and then another until he is drunken." His trage­dy was that he did not know the simple truth that man is both body and spirit. He did not know the fact that he was un­der the power of sin and death. Every night demons held a de­mons' carnival in his soul.

The story of Cain is very fa­miliar to us. He knew God but he did not re­spect God. He did not obey God. He wanted to be his own man. When he felt good he bought a Big Mac for his younger brother, Abel. But when he felt bad he killed his brother by beating him to death. Still God prom­ised him that God would care for him. But he did not accept God's prom­ise. Cain said to God, "My punish­ment is more than I can bear" (Ge 4:13). When Cain want­ed to live in the world leaving God out, he had no direc­tion. So he became a restless wan­derer. He was going somewhere every day until he was com­pletely ex­haust­ed. His life was constant sufferings and hardships. Cain wanted to live freely, leav­ing God out of his life so that he might live freely in his own way. But he was not free. He was a restless wan­derer.

There was a man called Zacchaeus. His official title was "Chief tax collec­tor of Jeri­cho." He ate a lot. As a result, he weighed more than 250 pounds even though he was 4' 11". He did not need a chair because he was so roly-poly that his standing and sitting didn't look any differ­ent. One day he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by Jericho. Since he was short, he climbed up a syca­more tree to see Jesus. Jesus saw that he was a lost soul. Jesus' compassion­ate heart went out to him. Jesus called him, "Zac­chaeus, come down immedi­ately. I must stay at your house today" (Lk 19:5). Jesus invited himself and his disci­ples to Zacchaeus' house and gave him the grace of forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Je­sus declared to the world, "He is also a son of Abra­ham" (Lk 19:9). It was indeed a glorious declaration to this wret­ched man Zacchaeus. Then Zac­chaeus' heart was changed. He confessed he would give half of his possessions to the poor and if he owed anything to anybody he would pay them back four times as much. If he really wanted to do so, he had to get a huge loan from the bank. It was impossible to carry out what he said. But his repentant testi­mony was very sincere and tearful. More than that, his story tells us that money didn't make him happy. Jesus made him happy when he came to Jesus as he was.

As was Zacchaeus, the Sadducees were fallen men because they did not know the Bible. What they worried about was whom to marry. And what made their hair stand was how to grab some­thing in their hands. They were greedy and selfish. Romans 2:7,8 says, "To those who by per­sis­tence in do­ing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eter­nal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." The Sadducees were in God's wrath and anger.

II. The God of Abraham (24-27)

**First,** they will be like the angels in heaven (24-25). The Sadducees came to Jesus to trap him. How did Jesus deal with them? Jesus knew that they had a malicious inten­tion. But Jesus did not mind. Jesus loved them as a mother loves her children. Je­sus said in verse 24, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?" Je­sus did not rebuke their immediate evil intention and their motive to trap him. Rather Jesus wanted to help them see their error in light of God's word. When Je­sus saw them, they had many prob­lems. But the root prob­lem was that they did not know the Bible and that our God is the living God and the Ruler of human history. The Sadducees had to believe the basic truths in the Bible. For in­stance, God created the heavens and the earth and every­thing in it (Ge 1:1). On the sixth day he made man. God made man in the image of God so that man can grow until he would become like Jesus. God made the garden of Eden in the best part of the world. There God estab­lished one family be­tween Adam and Eve so that they could be stewards of God's world. In other words, God gave man mission as the meaning of life. God also gave man a command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Ge 2:17) in order to establish the spiritual order of the uni­verse: God first; man­kind second; the world and everything in it third. If there is no order in the world, the world would be chaotic and lawless.

Especially, the Sadducees had to know that God made his one and only Son a ran­som sacrifice for the sin of the world. God gives eternal salva­tion in which they could enjoy the love of God and the peace of God. In fact, they knew all these. But they sup­pressed the absolutes of God deliber­ately, because they were so attached to the things of the world. If they had want­ed something, it was to live in the world forever as yuppies. They did not know the truth of God that all men were made out of the dust of the ground and all men go back to the dust of the ground. They did not know that God is Spirit (Jn 4:24). Man is a soul.

There is a story about a queen. Her husband was a despotic king. He was merciless to other people, even to his succeeding king. But he loved his wife so dearly for 35 years. In spite of himself, the king gave all of his affec­tion to his wife. When the king felt he was going to die, he said to his wife, "You can request anything you want in your heart. Then the request will be granted, what­ever it may be." The queen confessed that she had been a Christian for the last 30 years. And she pleaded with the king that she be baptized by a mis­sionary and receive eternal salva­tion. The king was sur­prised that the queen did not appreciate the power and glory of his king­dom. But as he promised, he said, "Your re­quest is granted," and cried. The queen's story tells us that God made man to be hap­py when one's soul is in Jesus.

Contrary to what the Sadducees thought, death is not the end of every­thing. Man is immortal. Man has eternal life. Man has God's promise that he will inherit the kingdom of God. John 6:63 says, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." When we die, our flesh goes back to the dust of the ground because it came from the dust. But our soul lives forev­er.

Read verse 25. "When the dead rise, they will neither mar­ry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." Here "an­gels" do not refer to God's messengers or neutral beings as ordinary angels. In this case the words, "like the angels," mean that they will be like Jesus. 1 Corin­thi­ans 15:49 says, "And just as we have borne the likeness of the earth­ly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heav­en." Jesus did not talk about the struggle of mar­riage or possessions. Jesus told them that they would enjoy eternal salvation and the beau­ty of the kingdom forever. When we believe in the resur­rection of Jesus we can receive the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God gives us joy and peace and security. We must hear Je­sus' words, "They will be like the angels in hea­ven." When we hear Jesus' words we can believe that we shall be like Jesus.

**Second,** God is living (26-27). Look at verse 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'?" This verse is a quotation of Exodus 3:6. When Moses gave up his prince­ship in the Egyptian Empire and chose to live with the people of God, he had to undergo 40 years of wilder­ness life with Jethro's seven daughters. He could not feel that God is living in his fugi­tive life. Once Moses saw a bush burning. It was burn­ing continuously. So he went near it to see it more careful­ly. Suddenly the word of God came to him. "Moses, Moses, take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Ex 3:4,5). Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6). Here God is teach­ing Moses that he is living. Whe­ther Moses was aware of God's presence or not, God is living. God is also Father to all mankind. Hu­manly speak­ing, God has to be Father to Ab­raham and God has to be Grandfather to Isaac and God has to be Great-Grandfa­ther to Jacob. But God says, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." This tells us that there is one God and all men of all genera­tions are his precious children.

Most importantly, Jesus is teaching the Sadducees that God is ruling world history. At the time Moses lived the civilization of Babylonia was gone. It was the time of the Egyptian Empire. The Egyptians invented math­ematics, astronomy and the art of oratory. Thus the Egyptian Empire culmi­nat­ed the peak of human civilization in his­tory. Moses was born a Hebrew slave. But by fortune, he became a prince, the son of Pha­raoh's daughter. When we review hu­man history, we see that Babylonian civili­za­tion is gone. Greek civilization is gone. Ro­man civiliza­tion is gone. After Roman civiliza­tion, barbarian civili­zation is going on. The world changes morning by morn­ing. But God's history is steadily mov­ing on to God's will for world salvation. As God promised, God sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ. According to God's will, he died and rose again. The world­ly kingdom is very temporal and kings and queens are born to be sor­rowful and miserable because of their sins. But God is the God of Abra­ham and God of Isaac and God of Jacob. He is living and he is ruling the world to save men from their sins without miss­ing one.

In this passage we learn that the Sadducees could not buy happiness with money. In this passage we also learn that there is no marriage problem in the kingdom of God. We will be like the angels; we will be like Jesus. We have eternal salvation in Jesus. In this passage we must remember that man is both body and spirit and we are precious children of God forever.