

Discussion Notes
April 12, 2015
Mark 12.18-27
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This text asks an important question for us all: is death the end? Jesus and the New Testament writers don't say this, which brings great hope to us all.

Some context surrounding the view of death, eternity and the soul in the ancient world:

- Much of Greek thought on the afterlife stemmed from Homer (The Iliad).
- The Pythagoreans believed in a pure, eternal soul that was at war with a tomb-like body. This gave rise to thinking (both in the church and outside) that the matter (the body) was bad and the soul or pure thought, was good.
- The options for ancient Greeks were not great. The truly learned or "great ones" might die and float up to be with the stars. The wicked would be punished, and the rest of us regular folk would wander the dusty, dim underworld (Hades).

Israel and humans and the afterlife:

- The Jews had very different thinking from the Greeks. To them a human was a *united* being, not a divided one.
- The body was made in God's image. The Spirit of God enlivened the body. The soul is our "living being", the "youness" that makes you. Though there are parts, we are one integrated, united being.

As we come to our text we must recall this question is asked of Jesus during the Passover, after he's already said some very controversial things and the climate is heating up. Currently he's being asked / is answering four defining questions:

- Loyalty to God or Caesar (12.13-17)
- What does God offer – our text (12.18-27)
- What does loyalty to God look like? (12.28-34)
- Who is Jesus? (12.35-40) – Jesus asks his own question!

Mark 12.18-23

- The Sadducees were the aristocratic leaders of the temple. They controlled the Sanhedrin, held high-priestly roles, and were also in bed with the Romans. They didn't believe in a physical, bodily resurrection and so they only really cared about what happened in the here and now. Because of this they might have considered their wealth and power a blessing. Surely God must smile on them if they're doing so well.
- They ask a contrived question to try and trip Jesus up – a ridiculous scenario.
- Ironically they miss the point of the Law reveals in having a man marry his brother's widow – God is concerned with a man's name *after* his death. God doesn't want us to pass out of existence post-mortem.

Mark 12.24-27

- Jesus' brevity in response will puncture their pride. He references the very book and man they claim up uphold – Moses. He says they don't know the scriptures or God's power. Ouch!
- First, he states that life *doesn't* go on as normal in the age to come, so their question is foolish. Marriage has its primary function in procreation, and since the resurrection will afford no death or end, procreation isn't necessary.
- Second, he makes mention of Exodus 3 – where God speaks to Moses saying he's the God of the three dead, honored patriarchs.
- This answers their question brilliantly. Either God is *not* the God of the living, or the deaths of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not their end!
- Game, set, match.

What this means for us:

- As people began to notice early on in the life of the church, this changed how Christians lived. People who *should* have fear of death had no fear of death! The unlearned, women, slaves, children, these people had confidence in something yet to come.
- This gives us great hope, especially in times of suffering. One day, we will be with God, every tear will be washed away, and the world will be put right.
- Job 19.25-27

Discussion Questions

- What did you grow up thinking about the afterlife?
- What did you learn from this teaching?
- How does Jesus' resurrection (and ultimately our own) bring you hope? Is this hard to grasp?