

Mk 12:18-27 No Marriage in Heaven

Tim Anderson 20/8/2023

One very live question that I've noticed that people have is "How should the Christian approach the Old Testament Scriptures?" Some people seem to take the approach that all of the Scripture should be treated equally as God's Word – as equally an authority for working out how to live the Christian life. Although they would be sensitive to the fact that God progressively revealed more of his will as time went on in his dealings with his people. So they would recognise that the New Testament is more directly applicable to the Christian – because it speaks to the Christian. Whereas the Old Testament speaks to believers in a different era of salvation history. But it is still God speaking. And to the people it addressed, it told them exactly what God required of them. That's one view.

Another group of people would see the Bible as a human record of humankind's search for God. They might describe the Old Testament as people groping around in the dark. Sometimes stumbling across something crucial – but oftentimes fumbling around and making many mistakes. A much clearer revelation of God's will came through Jesus Christ. So the New Testament can be viewed more fully as God's Word. And if you pushed them, you would probably find out that even within the New Testament, there are some places that they trust more to reveal the will of God than others.

They might say,
"The letters written by the apostles
were inspired by interacting with Christ,
so they are a good witness to the mind of God,
but they were still written by fallible human beings.
The gospels however contain much of the teaching of Christ.
Christ's own words recorded for us.
So this part of Scripture they prize most dearly
as being our best access to the mind of God."

And there's probably a third group of people
who would think to themselves,
"What's all the fuss about?
Why can't we just get on with loving God and loving our neighbour?
Why can't we just get on with it?"
Most of us would have days like that ...
But on the days when we're asking the question,
should we take the first view or the second view?

For me,
the best way to answer that question
is to see what Jesus did himself.
How did Jesus view the Old Testament Scriptures?
Both groups of people
would take the words of Jesus in the New Testament
as a direct witness to the mind of God.
So if we could establish what Jesus' attitude to the Old Testament was,
then we would have an example to follow.
We would have an authoritative view –
Jesus' own view –
of how Christians should relate to the Old Testament Scriptures.
Surely that would settle the matter.
And then to the relief of the third group,
we could all get on with loving God and loving our neighbour.

My claim is this.

In today's passage

there is revealed to us on the lips of the Lord Jesus
contained in his answer to the question of the Sadducees

his own view.

By reading today's passage

we can establish what Jesus' attitude to the OT was,
and so what ours should be.

But first let's have a look at the question the Sadducees asked Jesus.

It's a strange question, isn't it?

A woman marrying seven brothers
one after another as each one died.

And the Sadducees want to know
whose wife she will be at the resurrection?

I mean I'd be wanting to know, "Who supplied her with the arsenic?"

And "Why did the last few agree to marry her?"

But thankfully this is not a real situation.

It's just a hypothetical that the Sadducees have dreamt up.

They're picking up on a part of the law of Moses found in Deuteronomy.

This is what God said to the people of Israel through Moses,

Dt 25:5-6 "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 fulfil the duty of a brother in law to her.

The first son she bears

shall carry on the name of the dead brother

so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel."

Why did God make such a rule?

Because it was important for families to have a male heir.

You'll remember that part of the blessing that God promised his people
was to live in the promised land for ever.

Well you're not going to live forever yourself.
So if your family is going to live in the promised land forever,
there needs to be an unbroken line of descendents.
So the son who was born to the brother in law
would actually be treated
as if he had been born a son of his mother's first husband.
And he would inherit the part of the promised land
that was owned by his mother's first husband.
So the promise of God to the fore fathers,
that their offspring would have an inheritance in the land for ever
that promise would be kept.

Anyway the Sadducees aren't really so interested
in the situation of widows who don't have a son.
What they are really interested in
is a dispute they were having with the Pharisees.
The Pharisees believed
that God would raise up faithful believers on the last day.
The Sadducees believed that this life is all there is.
When you die,
you get eaten by worms and that's it.
After death is oblivion.
And their question to Jesus is an attempt to enlist his support.
What they are saying by their question is this.
"Jesus, it's plainly ridiculous
that a woman could have seven husbands in heaven.
So since this woman could have seven husbands if she went to heaven,
clearly there can be no such place.
Won't you support us in our argument with the Pharisees,
and confirm that you think
the idea of a resurrection is as ridiculous as we do?"

From Jesus' answer to the Sadducees' question
we learn at least three things.

Something about how Jesus views the Old Testament Scriptures,
something about marriage,
and something about the power of God.

How does Jesus view the OT Scriptures?

In verse 24, Jesus says to the Sadducees,

“Are you not in error because you don’t know the Scriptures?”

Jesus expects

that the Sadducees could have worked out from the Scriptures
that the dead would be raised.

Now that in itself is demanding.

The Sadducees only accepted the five books of Moses –

Genesis to Deuteronomy –

as Scripture inspired by God.

They considered the later additions to the Old Testament,

the writings of the prophets and the psalms,

not to be the inspired word of God.

Well Jesus doesn’t point them to a prophet like Daniel

who very clearly expresses belief in a general resurrection

and then tell them they should accept his writings as Scripture.

He points them to what they already accept as Scripture,

and shows them how they should have understood that God raises the dead
by reading the book of Exodus.

Where does the book of Exodus talk about resurrection?

God said to Moses,

“I am the God of Abraham,

the God of Isaac,

and the God of Jacob.”

Now Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been dead for four hundred years
by the time that God spoke these words to Moses.

And Jesus’ point is that God is the God of the living not the dead.

God didn’t say,

“I am the God who spoke to Abraham your forefather all those years ago.”

He said,

“I am the God of Abraham, full stop.”

And by saying it this way he indicated that he has an ongoing relationship with Abraham thus Abraham is alive.

In the same way I might say to you

Cherida Anderson is my wife

but I would not say to you

Nancy Davis is my grandmother,

I would say Nancy Davis was my grandmother.

Now I have to say that I don't think you should feel bad

if you have read Exodus a hundred times

and you would never have concluded

that there is a promise of resurrection.

I've read Exodus 3 many times

and I wouldn't have concluded there is a promise of resurrection there.

But with the benefit of Jesus' help,

I can see that resurrection is there.

Isn't it good

that we have Jesus help us see resurrection in the Old Testament!

So how does Jesus treat the Old Testament Scriptures?

He certainly doesn't take the view that in the Old Testament,

people were groping around in the dark.

That the accounts might be reliable in some respects,

in pointing to a few key truths,

like that there is one true God,

but generally you wouldn't want to base much on it.

On the contrary,

Jesus reads an important doctrine like the resurrection from the dead

from a very fine nuance of the conversation between God and Moses.

Jesus treats the Old Testament here and elsewhere

as absolutely reliable.

The teaching of Christ is that all of the Bible is the word of God.

If anyone says,
“I base my life on the teaching of Christ,”
then they had better acknowledge the whole Bible as God’s word.
New Testament and Old Testament as equally inspired by God,
equally revealing the mind of God to us.
That’s what Jesus does.
If you follow him,
that's what you will do too.

In his answer to the Sadducees,
Jesus also tells us something about marriage.
Now I have to confess to being a bit of a fan of marriage.
The thought of being separated from Cherida makes my blood run cold.

And when I look around,
many of you cherish your marriages like I do.
Or cherished your marriages until your partners died –
So how do you feel when Jesus says in verse 25,
“When the dead rise,
they will neither marry nor be given in marriage;
they will be like the angels in heaven.”
You will not be married in heaven.
I will not be married in heaven.
There will be no marriage in heaven.
I’ve met Christians who feel slightly cheated when they hear those words.
Their marriage is so precious to them,
they can’t bear the thought of losing it.
Why?
When marriage is such a good thing,
why won’t it be in heaven?

Marriage gives us the possibility of a relationship of great intimacy.
But it’s great intimacy with one person to the exclusion of everyone else.
If you go around being too intimate

with people who you aren't married to,
your marriage won't last too long!
In heaven, there will be great intimacy and love shared by everyone.
Do you have a great marriage here on earth?
Your relationship with your partner will be even better in heaven –
presuming they are there.
And your relationship with every other person will be just as good.
What we lose by not having marriage in heaven,
is not the intimacy in relationships,
it is the exclusivity of that one relationship.
In heaven you will have such deep love for everyone,
that an exclusive relationship with one person won't make sense.

Now that's great news for all of us.
But particularly its great news for single people.
You could imagine a single person thinking
that it's sad that they won't have that special someone in eternity
like many of their friends do.
Isn't it great to know that in heaven,
the single person has relationships with everyone there
better than the best marriage?

The thing that on the surface is bad news –
“There is no marriage in heaven”
is actually great news.

And it should help us keep things in perspective.
Many of you like me have children.
And for some of us,
our greatest dream for our children
is that they will find themselves a good partner.

But is it the most important thing?
If they stay single

and single-mindedly serve Jesus all their days,
is that a tragedy?

No it's not.

Instead of grizzling about the lack of grandchildren,
like I might be tempted to if my kids remained single,
I should rejoice that they have the opportunity
to be single minded in serving Jesus.

Many single people testify that they lead fulfilling lives on earth,
and can do many things that married people are not able to do.

And in heaven single people
just like people who were married in this life
will have relationships of such intimacy
that even married people can't imagine it.

So we've learnt from the Lord Jesus something about the Scriptures
and something about marriage,
and finally we need to learn something about the power of God.

Now I'm sure some of you will be surprised to hear me say this,
but knowing the Scriptures well
is not all there is to knowing the mind of God.

Now I'm not just saying
that there is more to living a Christian life than knowing the Scriptures.
There are plenty of people who have a simple trust in the Lord Jesus,
without being Bible scholars,
who live lives of great love, compassion and faithfulness to their Saviour.
That much is obvious.

But I'm saying more than that.

There is actually more to knowing the mind of God,
there is more to having a deep understanding of theology,
than just knowing your Bible.

You can't understand the mind of God
without an understanding of the power of God.

You see the Sadducees undoubtedly knew their Bibles pretty well.
When Jesus said to them,
“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, Isaac and Jacob”?”

There’s no doubt that not only had they read it,
most of them could have quoted it to Jesus.

They weren’t in error because they didn’t know the Scriptures.
They were in error because they didn’t know the power of God.
They could have read the story about the burning bush 1000 times,
but it never would have hit them that God will raise the dead.

Why not?

Because their minds were closed to the power of God.
They didn’t think it was possible that God could raise the dead.
They didn’t think that was possible before they read the Scriptures.
So they didn’t see the evidence when they read the Scriptures.

They didn’t even think God is powerful enough
to bring the dead back to life in a life like this one.

But Jesus revealed to them,
not only would the dead be raised,
but when they are raised,
their life will be of such love and intimacy,
that it will be shared with everyone in heaven.

No longer will there be marriage,
because love and intimacy will be for all.

The power of God was more than the Sadducees could possibly imagine.

Now this is a tremendous challenge for us.

I’d like it if we knew our Bibles better.

That would be good for us.

But more than that,

I think we need to know the power of God.

Why is it

that Charismatic and Pentecostal churches are growing and flourishing around Australia?

And in the main, Anglican churches are dwindling.

It's not because they know their Bibles better than we do.

It may be partially because they meet the community where they are at.

Because they package the gospel message in a way that people today can hear.

That might be part of the reason.

But I believe a significant part of the reason is because they know the power of God.

It's hard to believe in the power of God.

God is incredibly powerful and the evidence is all around us, but it's still hard to believe.

Amanda knocked on my door a couple of months back and asked me to pray for her.

It happens relatively often that people I've never met knock on my door.

What never happens is that they start coming to church.

But Amanda has committed herself to following Jesus because God is powerful.

And we need to believe that he's powerful.

Powerful to change people!

Sue Prowd saw Leah down the shopping centre and invited her to church.

We shouldn't be surprised that Leah came along.

Because God is powerful.

You won't understand God or the Bible

unless you get your head around the fact that God is powerful.

Not just somewhere else some other time.

Here and now: God is powerful.

Turn to your neighbour and tell them:

"God is powerful here and now!"

I would encourage you.

The knowledge of the power of God
comes from seeing it in action.

You see it in action when you put your faith into practice.

We you expect to see God act powerfully,
he will not disappoint you.

Let's view the Scriptures like Jesus.

Remember that there's no marriage in heaven
and why that's a good thing.

Let's know the power of God by putting our faith into practice.