



Speaker:
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Our Resurrection

◀ Series: The Gospel of Mark • 43 of 43

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Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection. And they asked him saying, “Master, Moses wrote unto us, if a man’s brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were seven brethren. And the first took a wife and, dying, left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed. And the third likewise. And the seven had her and left no seed. Last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? For the seven had her to wife.”

And Jesus answering said unto them, “Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven. And as touching the dead, that they rise, have ye not read in the book of Moses how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. Ye therefore do greatly err.”

I said to you last week about the three types of Jewish religious leader. I said we’d come to see how each would confront Jesus. Last time, the Pharisees attempted to trick Jesus into saying something treacherous either to the Jewish people or to Imperial Rome.

That attempt failed. So now it’s the turn of the Sadducees. But who are they?

Although they have a shared origin with the Pharisees, their views differed widely:

- The Pharisees believed in the doctrine of divine sovereignty, whereas the Sadducees believed in complete free will.
- The Pharisees accepted all parts of the Scriptures as well as oral tradition. The Sadducees, even if they partly accepted other parts of the Old Testament, held the Pentateuch in higher regard and completely rejected oral tradition.
- And as our story indicates today, they deny the concept of a resurrection and things associated with it.

Since they rejected the notion of a resurrection, this ruled out any future judgement. They also, quite rightly, rejected the view held even by some Christians that when they die, they live for ever as immaterial souls or even angels. So to them, this life is all there is. You get one shot, and that’s it. They put all their efforts into making this life as enjoyable and “successful” as possible. No wonder then they pursued status and wealth so much.

They present to Jesus a hypothetical situation (v.19-23). It's possible they got the idea from the apocryphal book of Tobit, where a woman married seven times but remained childless.

They tie this scenario in with a principal taken from the Old Testament. If a woman lost her husband before they had any children, it was the responsibility of the husband's brother to get her pregnant. In this way, the family line would remain unbroken and there'd be someone to inherit.

We see here yet another example of Jesus asking a counter question (verse 24). That is, he begins his answer to them with a question. It was common for rabbis to use this approach, but Jesus used it a lot more.

He tells them they were wrong on two counts. Firstly, they didn't understand their own Bible. Secondly, they underestimated the power of God. Undoubtedly, they were greatly offended at this. Not only were part of the upper echelons of Jewish society being challenged by one of the common people; these religious leaders in Israel were having their authority to teach challenged by an uneducated tradesman.

I'd like to use this passage today to speak about resurrection. If you're thinking I've orchestrated my preaching so that I'd be speaking on the subject on this Easter Sunday, you'd be wrong. As you know, I pay no attention to holy days, feasts, sabbaths, and so on. As a preacher, I don't tailor my messages to include Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Lent or any other traditional commemoration. People who commemorate these things do so—we hope—for the glory of God. And I *avoid* them for the glory of God! And we don't judge each other.

So I intend to look at the basis for our bodily resurrection, the certainty of it, and what it will be like.

ITS FOUNDATION

"We preach Christ crucified." That quote from God's word is a motto for all preachers in Christian congregations. It's the preaching of the cross, the Bible tells us, that's the power of God that saves. What we mean of course is it's this message that God uses to save his elect people.

But we know *every* aspect of God's saving process is necessary. Calvary has always been used as a pivotal moment in the process, but it'd be worthless without Jesus's resurrection.

Having paid the penalty for the sins of his believing people, Jesus died. I could try to explain how the Son of God could die, but I suspect any explanation understandable by us will be in some way heretical. But the Bible tells me he died. So that fact can be safely broadcasted far and wide.

For several days, Jesus Christ was in the grave. But you'll remember something we've already come across in Mark's gospel. We heard how Jesus predicted his own crucifixion, death and resurrection. Here's one description of what happened, taken from Matthew's gospel:

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the keepers did shake and became as dead men.

And the angel answered and said unto the women, "Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee. There shall ye see him. Lo, I have told you."

And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "All hail." And they came and held him by the feet and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, "Be not afraid. Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me."

Matthew 28:1–10

"HE IS RISEN." What words these are! I can imagine those words echoed throughout every corner of the spiritual realm, stunning the devils and Satan. They'd no doubt thought Jesus's death was a victory for their army. They'd frustrated God's plan and were now about to begin a glorious new era of war against God.

But it was God's plan, not theirs, that had succeeded. The Nazarene had conquered death and dealt a fatal blow to Satan. Day and night, they're tormented by those words: "He is risen!" All they have to look forward to now is the Lake of Fire. And they'll share the place with untold millions of the human race, those who were never part of God's family. And no doubt Satan will be besieged day and night by hordes of accusers asking, *Why did you lie to us?*

Jesus Christ had been dead but came alive again. I said it was necessary to God's purposes and that it accomplished numerous things. Here are a few:

- He showed himself to be God
- He conquered death
- He fulfilled prophecy
- He proved his sacrifice was acceptable to God
- He justified the church

And I could go on. But for the purpose of our focus today, we'll consider **how his resurrection paved the way for our bodily resurrection.**

Jesus was the first person in history to be truly resurrected. There'd been examples of people who'd been dead and were made alive again, such as the ones famously revived by Elijah and Jesus. But these were not true resurrections. The people were raised in exactly the same state as when they died. They were destined to get older and eventually die again.

But the resurrection of Jesus, giving us clues as to the nature of our resurrection, involved a new body that would never die. And this is why we say Jesus was our forerunner. His resurrection is the basis for ours.

ITS CERTAINTY

As we return to our passage, we enter the story at a point where Jesus hasn't yet died and been resurrected. We noted some Sadducees had approached him to trip him up. And they too were insincere in their approach. The question itself was an act of mockery, as they pretended to hold him as a true teacher and talked about the resurrection as if they believed in it.

We'll look at the marriage question later. I'd like to look firstly at his confession of the resurrection as a truly Biblical doctrine. He quotes from the beginning of the book of Exodus. It's the famous episode of the burning bush. Jehovah had described himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (In his wisdom, Jesus quotes from the Pentateuch, the only part of the Scriptures the Sadducees took any notice of.)

Let's have a think about why Jesus uses that statement to make a case for the resurrection. In Moses's day, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were all dead. Jesus's point is if those Patriarchs were, as the Sadducees claimed, going to remain dead for all time, God would have spoken differently. We'd expect him to have said, "I was the God of Abraham..." God was in effect saying he hadn't finished with the Patriarchs. They were in the grave, in Sheol, and were dead. But God intended to recreate them in the near future, and it's from that perspective he calls himself their God.

I'd like to look at just a few verses from different parts of Scripture to show the joyful hope that is the resurrection of the dead.

The first one's from the Old Testament:

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Daniel 12:2

Daniel's phrase, "many of them", isn't what it first appears. He means the multitude of mankind. Billions will rise on that day. Many will not be surprised. For us who have believed on Jesus, and trusted in the power of his resurrection, we'll have spent our entire Christian lives with this great hope.

The rest will be utterly devastated. Their worst fears will be realised.

We've heard Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection. We'll quote him from John's gospel now, where he says:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice.

John 5:28

Just to reiterate, he says “all”. For we who are God’s people, the joy of that great day will far exceed anything we’ve experienced before—even our conversion. At that very instant, we’ll no longer need faith in the promise. All those tormenting doubts will be behind us for ever.

And the other people? At the very same instant, their eternity of regret and sorrow will begin. There’ll be all kinds of pagans and New Agers there, of course. But the sentence to be carried out on them will be relatively light, even if full of misery.

The biggest losers on that day will be those who spent their life in church. That is, those who heard the gospel the most but never submitted to Christ will bear the greatest guilt. The evil men of Sodom will be there, and they’ll be thankful they’re not in the shoes of the churchgoers.

When we look at the preaching of the apostles, we find it to be full of references to the resurrection of the body. Their starting point was the resurrection of Jesus, of course; but the end time bodily resurrection of the saints was at the very heart of their preaching. Listen to this example:

And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Acts 4:1–2

It’s important Christians get hold of this. One of the most common terms heard spoken by preachers in our day is, “going to heaven”, even though you’ll never find that phrase—or anything like it—in the preaching of the apostles. On the other hand the references to the hope of the resurrection are hardly preached at all today, yet this language can be found all over the Bible. If you’re interested, read through the book of Acts in one sitting and see if what I’m saying isn’t true. As a preacher, I’m meant to reflect what’s actually in the Bible, rather than repeating thoughts and phrases I’ve inherited from Christians I’ve learned from.

We’ve had an example from the Old Testament, one from the mouth of Jesus, one from the mouth of the apostle, and now we’ll look at one more from one of the New Testament letters:

And God hath both raised up the Lord and will also raise up us by his own power.

1 Corinthians 6:14

The apostle Paul was one of those who read about the resurrection in the Hebrew Scriptures, heard it had been taught by Jesus, had an encounter with the risen Jesus which confirmed it, preached it to introduce the doctrine of the resurrection of the saints, and here he’s now communicating the same doctrine in his letters to the churches.

On one occasion, Paul met some people who lived according to Greek philosophy. He spoke to them about the gospel. And as I’ve said, the doctrine of the end-time resurrection was central to his preaching there. Their reactions were interesting. Some of them dismissed the notion of a resurrection outright. But others were intrigued and wanted to learn more.

It's still the same today. When we proclaim what we believe in our heart to be factual—things like creation, the virgin birth, miracles and the resurrection—many will dismiss those things out of hand. Because they've never experienced anything like those things in their lifetimes, they conclude they're impossible. They use their faulty reason to decide it's all nonsense.

But from time to time we find those who want to know more. And some of them go on to believe on Jesus Christ wholeheartedly. Whether they were ancient Epicureans or present-day football supporters, they're all God's elect, chosen by him before the world was and in time drawn irresistibly to Jesus Christ.

The word of God tells us God didn't leave Jesus Christ's soul in the grave. And throughout the word, we have abundant encouragements to believe God will likewise not abandon our souls in the grave but will raise up on that glorious day.

ITS NATURE

You might wonder why the Sadducees proposed such a fantastic scenario of marital conundrums in the world to come. It's simply this: the only version of resurrection the Sadducees had heard of was the one described by the Pharisees.

The Pharisees had a materialistic view of the resurrection. They taught people would be raised in exactly the same condition as they died. So, for example, when people in wheelchairs who'd died were raised from the dead, they'd be back in a wheelchair for all eternity!

This sort of teaching was a gift to the Sadducees. I imagine they'd thrown this marriage example at the Pharisees on many occasions and received poor responses. And if marriage did persist into the world to come, this would be one of the many problems to be faced.

When we look at verse 25, we can see Jesus's explanation. When we rise, there won't *be* any marriage. He says we'll be like angels, but don't think that means we'll be genderless. It just means there'll be no more need for us to procreate than for the angels.

Some Christians have been concerned that, after the resurrection, they won't be married to their Christian spouses. I think that's a fairly natural feeling to have. God invented marriage, and whether it involves having children or not, the man and wife will love each other. And if that marriage has God at its centre, it's expected the couple will grow in their love for each other.

Yet it's at the end of their lives, when they've lived through all their battles, experienced all the joys and trials of marriage, have this huge bank of memories to think on and, most of all, love each other deeply, that God forces a divorce on them!

Of course, in God's new world, they'll still love each other but in a different way. I was describing this the other day to Karen. And I got the impression she still wasn't a hundred percent satisfied with my explanation. You see, I suspect that, especially with wives, they

feel uneasy that they won't be special to their husbands anymore. They'll be loved by their former husbands in the same way they love everyone else there.

But think on this. Our attitudes be different then. Our love for each other will be greater than anything experienced in this life. So when wives bump into their former husbands, they'll experience a love between them greater than they had formally. And let's not forget: all will have the company of Jesus Christ himself, and our love for him will put our love for others in the shade.

It's in Paul's letters to the Corinthians we find the longest discourses on the subject of the resurrection of the saints. Let's look at one reference which describes the nature of our resurrected selves:

And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.
1 Corinthians 15:49

Right at the top of my family tree is the first man, Adam. And he had children, and they had children, and so on; and so began that long list of my ancestors and yours. And in this process, something of sinful Adam was passed on. The power of God that could sustain a man in a perfectly sinless state was turned down a notch. Those ancestors, and all who came after them, were found to have a bias towards sin. Theologians have called this tendency in each of us "original sin".

In other words, just as in some sense we bear the image of God, we also bear the image of Adam. But Paul encourages us to believe we'll be raised in the likeness of the heavenly, spiritual, body of the risen Jesus.

We could talk forever about how the resurrection will take place. There's lots you could think about. Like how it's easier for us to imagine someone recently deceased coming back to life than someone who died 3000 years ago whose bones don't even exist anymore.

When the Bible talks about resurrection, for our sakes it talks about the imagery of someone in a cemetery being roused from their sleep. But God knows, and the authors of Scriptures knew, this didn't represent a typical resurrection. People will be in all kinds of states of decomposition when Jesus comes. Think on this: water molecules from the body of Abraham will have been absorbed into the environment. One of them could be floating round in my glass of water even! But we don't dwell on such things, but instead leave the mechanics of the resurrection to God.

I was reading Ezekiel the other day. It was that well-known bit about the valley of dry bones. Let me read a section to remind you:

And he said unto me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, thou knowest." Again he said unto me, "Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, 'O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones: "Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.'""
Ezekiel 37:3-6

This prophecy was fulfilled in a material way with the return of the Jews from their exile. But it clearly uses the imagery from the future, physical resurrection of the body. God will be raising some who've only recently died, but there will be others who are just a pile of bones. And God gives to Ezekiel a vision of bones being clothed again with muscle, sinews, skin, and so on. Finally, God animates the man by his Spirit.

I dream of the day when God will, at the same moment, change me and awaken me by the power of his Spirit.

And we should make the point this new body is designed to last for ever. As I said the other week, right now *only God* has immortality. But look what's coming:

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

1 Corinthians 15:53

What a promise this is, that we'll get to live as long as God! And since we know God is eternal, we'll live for all eternity. I can't wait to see what things God has in store for us to do. I'd like to learn carpentry from Jesus himself if such a thing will be possible. But it's his presence I covet the most.

And this change we'll experience at the end of time is performed by Jesus himself:

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body...

Philippians 3:21a

Not only will he allow us to live forever with him, but he will furnish us with bodies suitable for fellowship with him on that plane of existence.

Our resurrection is a great reward. You should try to bring it to mind every day, the way you do quite naturally when you're only days away from a good holiday, or retirement. The resurrection is a spiritual matter and is less easily brought to mind; but try to think on these things.

For one thing, the blessed hope of the resurrection is an encouragement to us to *keep going*. Let the certainty of it help you through your "black cloud" moments. Remind others about it, so they can experience something of the joy that awaits them.

Jesus is coming, and all those in the graves, and all those alive at his return, will finally get to meet him.

When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Colossians 3:4

Amen.