



## Hazelbank Presbyterian Church



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I wonder if you like me feel that Mark Chapter 12 is a bit like a firing range where after one group of people has had a go at trying to hit the target with Jesus the next group comes up and takes their turn to do the same thing. The whole thing seems almost pathetic and it would be if a man's life was not on the line. Last week we thought about who the Pharisees and the Herodians were, today we meet the Sadducees.

So who are the Sadducees? Someone has written: The Sadducees were extremely status conscious. They were worldly and wealthy, ill mannered and rude. Josephus, the early church historian wrote about them, "The Sadducees...are, even among themselves, rather boorish in their behaviour, and in their intercourse with their peers are as rude as aliens." They were a proud and arrogant lot who somehow thought they were better than other people.

Acts 23:8 tells us that they did not believe in the resurrection nor did they believe in the existence of angels and spirits. They only accepted the Torah, or the first five books of our Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, the books of Moses as they are sometime known. They claimed that the resurrection was not taught in the Torah. Therefore, it was a false doctrine. The Sadducees were no doubt delighted whenever the Pharisees and Herodians had been so easily handled by the Lord Jesus. They, however, had a question, which no one had been able to answer. It concerned the resurrection. The Sadducees prided themselves on being rational and logical in thought. They did not believe in the resurrection. It was unreasonable to them and they had developed a very sophisticated defence mechanism.

It is thought by some that the question they put to Jesus concerning the resurrection was one, which had been put successfully to the Pharisees and others who believed in the resurrection. No one had been able to answer their question. They probably felt confident that Jesus would not be able to answer it as well. Although He had easily handled the Pharisees and Herodians, He would certainly be no match for them - or at least this is what they thought. And so in their unyielding and stubborn way, they came to Jesus. They did not attempt to flatter Him at all. Rather, they came in all their brashness and put their question directly to Him.

<sup>18</sup>Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. <sup>19</sup>"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. <sup>20</sup>Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. <sup>21</sup>The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. <sup>22</sup>In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. <sup>23</sup>At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" <sup>24</sup>Jesus replied, "**Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? <sup>25</sup>When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. <sup>26</sup>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' ? <sup>27</sup>He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"

There are a host of issues and questions that are flung into the air with a reading like this. It is quite possible that as you read this today your mind went down one particular track. And yet in some ways these are simply smoke screens thrown up to hide the real issues that are at hand. There are dozens of sermons within this one reading and yet there is a central point that comes from it.

Our knowledge 1) of Scripture and 2) the power of God

The Sadducees only held the Torah as authoritative, and didn't think Torah taught resurrection. Jesus shows them otherwise, from Exodus 3:1-6, the burning bush account. In other words God didn't say to Moses I was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' But I am! He emphatically still is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. "God of ..." means that for us God still is our helper, saviour, protector, and provider of redemption. He is not the helper, protector of the dead, but of living. God's faithfulness implies that there is a resurrection for those who have faith in him. What's the point of protecting Abraham, Isaac, Jacob during the course of their life, but failing to deliver them from death? They were badly mistaken!

Let's look at these two basic and yet crucial points that we need to be sure of to avoid error and avoid falling into traps.

1) We must know the Scriptures, our Bibles to avoid error and traps.

Obviously, we need to know our Bibles if we are going to avoid the same mistake they made. We're not talking about basic ignorance – the Sadducees probably had the entire Torah memorized – the first 5 books of the Old Testament! We think we are doing well if we can struggle to remember the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16. But the important thing here is that we are not talking about being able to recite memory verses but we're talking about understanding. They were so committed to what they had presumed about the bible, that they had actually misread the Scriptures. They assumed there was no supernatural in particular the resurrection, Angels and spirits. And because they didn't believe in this it impacted their reading. We do the same. We get trapped by our religion when we become so committed to an ideology, a method, a pet topic, what someone important to us said, that we misread our Bibles.

Recognizing the need for this in my own life, I have set out to study certain things this year and read certain books. There is a tendency after you are ordained to forget, not necessarily deliberately, the things you vows at ordination. When I was ordained nearly nine years ago I made a vow that stated that I would accept light from any quarter. In other words if it was from God regardless as how God brought it to me I had to take it and understand it. This goes back to what John himself said in 1 John 4:

<sup>1</sup>Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup>This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup>but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

If we are going to avoid being trapped by our religion, we must not so much know our Bible – as we need to understand what God is saying to us through it. Reading is the first step. You simply cannot know it if you don't read it. If you don't have a Bible, and you really want to read it, come and speak to me afterward...or to one of our elders in the counselling room upstairs.

The next step is studying. Jesus' answer to these guys was not simply as straightforward as reading. It required thinking. The Bible is written in such a way that God rewards those who diligently look into them. Make use of opportunities such as small groups, our Bible study groups and the upcoming 40 days of purpose at the end of April. Jesus said they made two errors, didn't he? What was their other error?

2) They were in error because they did not know the power of God.

Jesus said they didn't know the power of God. In regards to resurrection, they didn't know God's power. They didn't recognize the fact that God has the kind of power necessary to raise people from the dead. But this says more about their religion: It was about knowledge, facts, and men. It was without power. Their God was perhaps a cultural icon, but he had no power. That's religion, and that will trap you. We must know the power of God to avoid the same error. If we don't want to be like them (and we don't!), we have to know the power of God. What does this mean? Partly it means having an understanding, a concept of God that includes this kind of power.

The Bible has a lot to say about God's power:

- Displayed in creation – Rom. 1:20: For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse;
- Demonstrated in the resurrection – 1 Cor. 6:14;
- Changes us – Phil. 3:21: ...who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body;
- Eph. 1:18-20. Results in us knowing Christ's love and seeing incredible things happen. Results in us accomplishing every good deed and desire of God;
- 2 Thess. 1:11 Results in ability to patiently endure everything with joy;
- Col. 1:11 Results in overcoming fear;
- 2 Tim. 1:7: 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline;
- Results in us not being ashamed of Jesus, able to endure suffering – 2 Tim. 1:8.

Do you know the power of God?

A small congregation in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains built a new sanctuary on a piece of land willed to them by a church member. Ten days before the new church was to open, the local building inspector informed the pastor that the car park was inadequate for the size of the building. Until the church doubled the size of the car park, they would not be able to use the new sanctuary. Unfortunately, the church with its undersized car park had used every inch of their land except for the mountain against which it had been built. In order to build more parking spaces, they would have to move the mountain out of the back yard. Undaunted, the pastor announced the next Sunday morning that he would meet that evening with all members who had "mountain moving faith and believed in the power of God."

They would hold a prayer session asking God to remove the mountain from the back yard and to somehow provide enough money to have it paved and painted before the scheduled opening dedication service the following week.

At the appointed time, 24 of the congregation's 300 members assembled for prayer. They prayed for nearly three hours. At ten o'clock the pastor said the final "Amen". "We'll open next Sunday as scheduled," he assured everyone. "God has never let us down before, and I believe He will be faithful this time too."

The next morning as he was working in his study there came a loud knock at his door. When he called "come in", a rough looking construction foreman appeared, removing his hard hat as he entered. "Excuse me, Reverend. I'm from a Construction Company over in the next county. We're building a huge shopping mall. We need some hard fill rocks. Would you be willing to sell us a chunk of that mountain behind the church? We'll pay you for what we remove and pave all the exposed area free of charge, if we can have it right away. We can't do anything else until we get the hard fill in and allow it to settle properly."

The little church was dedicated the next Sunday as originally planned and there were far more members with "mountain moving faith" who believed in the Power of God on opening Sunday than there had been the previous week!

Do you know the power of God in your life?

This church is full of people who can testify to the amazing power of God in the lives. How he took what the world would term as hopeless situations and spun them around to create a beautiful life that now glorifies him. As I stand here this morning and look at this congregation, I am so thankful to so many of you who over the last two years have shared with me the amazing power of God in your life. And as I stand here and look at this congregation I get excited thinking to myself how many more lives God's power can actually touch if you would allow him real entrance into your life today. Jesus came in the power of God and with the power of God to free us from the traps that have ensnared us. Whether it is the claim of false religion or the inability to trust God with his power in your life.

On the day we looked at how others tried and failed to trap Jesus, we ourselves can realise that there is a way out, there is freedom and his name is Jesus. I'll let Him have the last word:

**“Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?”**  
And John 8:27: **“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”**

LET US PRAY