

Gospel of Mark 22 - Chapter 12, verses 18 – 34:-

In these verses The Lord Jesus Christ answers some basic questions from those who tried to catch him out in rival Jewish beliefs. The Sadducees, in contrast to the popular Pharisees, were very conservative and traditionalist; as well as being supportive of the Roman Governorship. They took their stand on the first five Books of the Jewish Scriptures (the Pentateuch) and rejected many of the traditions of the Pharisees. Among the beliefs which were rejected were eternal life, angels, spirits and fore-ordination or fate; see Acts chapter 23, verses 6 – 8. The second question here in Mark 12, put by ‘a Scribe’, comes over as being a straightforward query. It does enable the Lord Jesus to affirm quite clearly his essential orthodoxy and his faithfulness to the Law.

Verses 18 – 27:- The question from the Sadducees quite naturally concerned the resurrection which the Lord Jesus taught and they denied. For the Sadducees there was no such thing as existence after death.

The statement of the law of marriage is found in Deuteronomy chapter 25, verses 5 – 10. If a man died without children, his brother was to marry his widow and the first son of that union was then considered the child of the dead husband. See Ruth chapter 1, verses 11 – 13; chapter 3, verses 1 – 2 and verses 9 – 13 and chapter 4, verses 4 – 5 for a practical example.

The problem that the Sadducees raised seemed unanswerable. The possibility of a resurrection is only assumed by the Sadducees as a basis for their argument! They were trying to reduce the fact of the resurrection to an absurdity. In his reply the Lord Jesus Christ points out that “*you are leading yourselves astray . . .*”. They did not understand the O.T. scriptures and they underestimated the power of God to resolve any seeming difficulties regarding the idea of a resurrection. The comment of the Lord Jesus “*have you not read . . . ?*” expects an affirmative answer. The Sadducees would be very familiar with the life story of Moses. The passage on the Burning Bush says that “*I AM the God of Abraham . . .*” To be the God of Abraham is to be in fellowship with Abraham. When God spoke out of the Burning Bush, although the patriarchs had been dead for years, He was still in fellowship with them. Since there is life after death then resurrection will follow. Perfect human existence demands the union of the soul and body.

Verses 28 – 34:- The question here comes from ‘a scribe’; most likely a member of the party of the Pharisees. There seems to be no ulterior motive for the query and it comes over as genuine. Notice that the Lord Jesus does not go to the traditions of the scribes for his reply but directly to the written Law. The text, in Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 4 – 5, is from the creed known as the ‘Shema’ recited daily by all devout Jews. It asserts the distinctive principle of the Jewish faith., that God is one. The meaning of this command to “*love the Lord . . .*” is that he is to be loved with all of man’s powers and capacities. This is the foundation and summary of man’s total duty to God. The second commandment is quoted from Leviticus chapter 19, verse 18. Here likewise is the basis of man’s obligation to man. These two commandments are indeed foundational to all of the Law and the Prophets. Notice that the Lord Jesus has a word of encouragement for the scribe. He showed the kind of spiritual intelligence which, if persisted in would lead him into the Kingdom of God. It is the present spiritual kingdom to be entered into by faith and new birth which is in mind here. Compare this encounter with that of the Lord Jesus and Nicodemus in the Gospel of John chapter 3, verses 1 – 6.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

*Let saints on earth in concert sing
with those whose work is done;
for all the servants of our King
in heaven and earth are one.*

*One army of the living God,
to his command we bow;
part of the host have crossed the flood,
and part are crossing now.*

*One family we dwell in him,
one Church above, beneath;
though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death.*

*Jesu, be thou our constant guide;
then, when the word is given,
bid Jordan’s narrow stream divide,
And bring us safe to heaven.*

Charles Wesley (1707 – 88) and others