

Life after Death

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 September 2022

Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 00] Well, what happens to us when we die? It is a question that has been pondered as long as humanity has existed, and it's not what we think about all the time. Of course, that would be quite morbid, but it does come to the fore when somebody dies, especially someone who is close to us.

And this week, of course, we've acknowledged that we mourn the loss of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. And so we all have varying degrees of interest in what happens when we die, from the very youngest who will ask questions to the very oldest who will be wondering about the future, from the religious to the secular. And whether it's because we're concerned about what is going to happen to us or about what will happen to our loved one who has passed away, there is a curiosity about the afterlife. Now, this is the issue that Jesus is questioned about in our Bible reading from Mark chapter 12. A group of religious teachers challenge Jesus about the resurrection because they're trying to catch him out. And so Jesus clarifies the reality of the resurrection, first of all for them, but he also clarifies the resurrection, the afterlife for us today. Because many would challenge, of course, the idea of a resurrection after death. Many are just confused about the afterlife. And so what Jesus says here is relevant for all of us, whether we call ourselves a Christian or not. And the reason is, of course, because we will all die. That is a certainty, isn't it? And so we don't want to be mistaken in our thinking when it comes to what happens when we die. And so what Jesus teaches us here has implications for all of us. And so we're going to look at this passage under three headings this afternoon. First of all, challenging the resurrection, verse 18 to 23. Second, clarifying the resurrection, 24 to 27, and then applying the resurrection. So first of all, let's look at challenging the resurrection. Now, this is like the next round of a fight between the religious authorities and Jesus. So in round one, we have the chief priests and the teachers of the law and the elders challenging Jesus about his authority. We saw that in chapter 11. Jesus won that round. Then in round two, chapter 12, verse 13 to 17, we saw it last week. The Pharisees come and the Herodians come, and together they challenge Jesus on politics. Jesus won that round as well. Now we come to round three, our passage we read this afternoon, and the Sadducees come to challenge Jesus on the resurrection. And so you can tell how that is going to go as well, can't you? It's a bit like Rangers when they get into the Champions League. You just know what is going to happen. They will lose. Same here when

Jesus comes in contact with these religious authorities. So look at verse 18. It says, but about that day, or our wrong chapter 18, then the Sadducees who say there is no resurrection came to him with a question. Now why are they called Sadducees? Well, they didn't believe in the resurrection, so they were sad, you see. I know it's an old joke, dad joke, sorry, but it does help sum up their position. Because you see, there were different groups within the Jewish religion.

Two main religious authorities were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Now the Sadducees were made up of high priestly families, and they dominated the Jewish Sanhedrin. That is the Jewish ruling council.

And so in some ways, the Sadducees and the Pharisees were rivals, where the big difference was between how they understood the scriptures, or for us, the Old Testament. So the Pharisees had a very broad understanding that included all of the Old Testament as being authoritative. It also included their oral traditions that they looked to, whereas the Sadducees had a much more narrow understanding.

[4 : 08] They only accepted the authority of the Torah, which is the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And so the Sadducees based their theology purely on these five books on the Torah. And according to their understanding of it, they found no support for the resurrection. And so while the Pharisees affirmed the resurrection and their broader understanding of the scriptures, the Sadducees denied it. In fact, they didn't believe in

anything supernatural at all, like angels or heaven. And so they wanted to challenge Jesus on the resurrection to show or to prove that it didn't make sense, that it was a crazy idea to believe in some kind of life after death. And so they've got a clever story to try and catch Jesus out. Let's just look at that again.

Verse 19, 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 raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. And so what they want to do is to mock the notion of the resurrection with this example from the law of Moses. Now the question was based on a law found in Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy chapter 25, it says this, 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 fulfill 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. It was called the Levirate, or it came to be known as the Levirate law of marriage from the Latin word *levir*, meaning brother-in-law. And it was given to protect a dead man's wife as well as his family line. And so if a man died without any children, it was his brother's duty to marry his widow so that the first son would then be counted as the dead man's son. And this way the dead man's name wouldn't be lost and his family line would continue.

Now there's an example of this in the book of Ruth, if you know the Old Testament part of the Bible, where Boaz is a kinsman redeemer. He provides for the family of Naomi, and as a result, that family line continues. And so the Sadducees take this scriptural law on marriage, and they ask this hypothetical question. And you know how it goes. There are seven brothers. The first married a wife, but died without any children. The second brother marries the woman, and then he died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third brother. In fact, all seven married the woman, but no children. And then the woman died. And so the big question was, there in verse 23, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?

Now, the Sadducees were attempting to show the absurdity of the resurrection. It was farcical, because they gave this not altogether impossible example. Now, the Sadducees thought they had boxed Jesus into a corner. They thought Jesus was up against the ropes. And you can just imagine them rubbing their hands. Okay, come on, Jesus. Let's see you get your way out of this one. How are you going to answer this? But before we see Jesus' response, it's worth acknowledging that people today still mock any notion of this resurrection or afterlife, resurrection after death, because it just sounds ridiculous, but for different reasons that they give here. Many are caught up, I guess, just with all the responsibilities of life in this world, with the pressure, trying to keep all the different plates spinning, so much to do, work is so hard, life is so busy, family demands are too great. And so there's no time to think about what happens when you die, because it's a way off in the distant future.

And others just think, this world is all that there is. So you are born, and you live, and you die, and that's it. And so people are skeptical about any kind of afterlife, let alone the suggestion of a resurrected body. I mean, how are you supposed to know? One of our teenagers asked me last week, how do you know? Nobody's died and come back to life to tell you what happens. And so that's why any talk of life after death seems like speculation at best and fantasy at worst. But Jesus tells his listeners that they're wrong on the resurrection, and he explains why. So let's move on to our second point.

[9 : 20] First is challenging the resurrection, and the second is clarifying the resurrection, verse 24 to 27. Jesus tells the Sadducees they're wrong. Not once, you notice, but twice. Verse 24, he says, are you not in error? And just in case they didn't get that, verse 27, you are badly mistaken. In other words, you're wrong, and then later on, you're wrong. And so as Jesus clarifies the reality of the resurrection, he poses two questions to his challengers. The first one exposes their ignorance, and then the second one explains the reality. So the first one, a question to expose their ignorance.

Verse 24, Jesus replied, are you not in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God? They're ignorant, Jesus says, of the scriptures, what they thought they knew, and they're ignorant of the power of God, ignorant of the God they claimed to trust in. In other words, they don't have a clue about what they're talking about. And so their denial of the resurrection wasn't some kind of informed, intelligent, reasonable, well-argued position. It simply proved they didn't know the

scriptures or the power of God. And so Jesus doesn't attack them where they're weak. He attacks them where they're strong. And that is on the scriptures. Because according to their understanding of the Torah, first five books of the Old Testament, there was nothing that indicated the possibility of resurrection. And so they regarded these scriptures as their supreme authority, what they based their lives on. And Jesus tells them they don't even know what these scriptures actually say. And he'd go on to show them what they do say about the resurrection. And we'll get to that. But not only that, he says they don't know the power of God. And so they completely underestimate the power of God that they claimed, the God they claimed to believe in. And so any kind of existence after death or angels or heaven seemed impossible to them. And I think that is why Jesus picks up on all of these points where they're wrong in verse 25. When the dead rise, this is the resurrection, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They will be like the angels in heaven. So all of the supernatural that they dismissed and denied, Jesus brings it all up. And so what he does is he corrects their simplistic thinking that resurrection life is basically just a continuation of this life. Because if your frame of reference is only this life, well, you will just think that this life or any afterlife is similar to the life we're living now. In other words, our existence after death is basically the same as our existence right now, where relationships, where concerns, where circumstances just simply continue on as if in a line. But Jesus makes it clear that resurrection life isn't a continuation of this life. Resurrection life is a transformed life. So it is different.

And so that's why we should be careful not to base our understanding of life after death on our experience of life before death. That's what Jesus is getting at here. So when he says, when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They will be like the angels in heaven. He's saying that resurrection life is obviously going to be different. And that's why people won't be getting married in heaven. Because marriage isn't part of that existence. Because it's a different kind of existence. And so the marriage relationships that we enjoy in this life, good as they are, they aren't for the life to come. Now that doesn't mean that you would know or recognize the person that you're married to in heaven.

[13 : 34] Because we will. But that God's creation design for marriage and for children isn't appropriate in the new creation.

Because the purpose of marriage for earthly life is no longer required for eternal life. Because there is only one marriage made in heaven. And that is the marriage between God and his people, or Christ and his church. And that's why some will be married in this life, and some will be single in this life. And each status, married or single, is no more special, or no more spiritual than the other. Because all relationships are secondary to our primary relationship with the God who made us. And so resurrection life in the new creation won't be a continuation of this existence. It will be a totally transformed existence altogether, and one without marriage. That's why Jesus says that when the dead rise, they will be like angels in heaven. Doesn't say we will be angels, but like angels in the sense that our existence will be a glorious one. We will have a resurrection body. And so there's no need to marry, no need to procreate in that existence. And so even if we can't imagine what it's going to be like,

Jesus assures us it is going to happen. One Bible commentator suggests, present earthly experience is entirely insufficient to forecast divine heavenly realities. We can no more imagine heavenly existence than an infant in utero can imagine a Beethoven piano concerto, or the Grand Canyon at sunset.

And so can you see how even the best illustrations just fail to do justice to the radical nature of resurrection life. And so if we struggle with Jesus's words about the life to come, it might just be that we are so caught up with this life, that we enjoy this life too much.

And so if we're banking on our best life now in this world and our best relationships now in this life, we fail to grasp the best is yet to come. And so if we think Jesus's words about marriage in heaven sound disappointing, it may be that we love life in this world too much in comparison to the beauty of an everlasting relationship with God, which will be far, far better. And so while our relationships will be different in heaven, we can be sure that they will be no less than what they are here on earth. They'll surely be far better because it's not as if we're going to go to heaven and have a resurrection body and be disappointed with anything in that existence. And the reason is it's because it's a relationship with Jesus Christ that matters most.

[16 : 48] And because of that, we can look forward to a resurrection life that is beyond our wildest dreams. And so let's never entertain, even just for one tiny moment, the thought that this world will

give us what we truly desire. Because that is to mock the resurrection life that God has in store for his people, which will be far greater. It will be far more beautiful than we could ever imagine.

And so Jesus' next question to his opponents explains the reality of this eternal life. So there's a question to expose their ignorance. He's done that. And there is a question to explain the reality. Verse 26 and 27, Jesus points to the scriptures about the reality of resurrection life. So 26 and 27, he says, Now about the dead rising, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He's not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken. Now the account of the burning bush is from the book of Exodus. And so what Jesus does is he chooses a passage of scripture that the Sadducees did accept as being authoritative, Exodus. And he picks up on the story of God speaking to Moses to show that they are wrong on the resurrection. Because when God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, God's words prove the resurrection life. So God said to Moses, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

Now, when God said this, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob had been dead for ages and their bodies were buried in the ground. But listen to what God said. God didn't say, I was the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. No, he said, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. So God spoke about his relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as if they were still alive. Because of course they were.

God claims to be their God, meaning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob continue to have a relationship with him. God's covenant relationship didn't end at the point of their deaths. Because God's covenant promise would be pretty weak, pretty insubstantial, sad, and just hopeless if it stopped when people died.

[19 : 28] That's why Jesus says, he is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Jesus is showing through God's word to Moses that life after death is a reality. It's in the scriptures. And it's the power of God that makes it happen. And so the teaching about the resurrection isn't just found in some Old Testament texts, Psalm 16 and lots of other places, and there are plenty of them. But the resurrection is grounded in God himself and in God's covenant relationship with his people, which because of God's power can never be ended even by death of us, of humans. And that's why the Sadducees were badly mistaken. They didn't know the word of God and they didn't know the power of God. And so they may have thought that they were religious. Lots of people do think they're religious. They may have thought that they had good, strong theological arguments, but Jesus says, you're wrong. And so just as Jesus clarified the resurrection for them, his reasoning should help clarify the resurrection for us today. What do I mean? Well, if somebody doesn't believe the scriptures and what they say, and if they doubt the power of God to do what God can do, then it's hardly surprising that they reject the reality of the resurrection. And so the Sadducees should be a warning for us, shouldn't they? Because no matter how unbelievable the resurrection life seems or how reasonable we think our human arguments are,

Jesus won't let us off the hook when it comes to the resurrection. He doesn't say, yeah, that's a really good point that you make. Yeah, you kind of got me there. Can't really come back on that one or answer that one. And he doesn't say, yeah, I just know it's really hard for you humans to believe, but you know, you just have to have faith. You know, that kind of faith that you believe something will happen, even if there's really no chance that it would. No, Jesus says you're wrong. He doesn't accept that a denial of resurrection life is a well-reasoned, well-grounded, legitimate position, position to adopt. Like the Sadducees, if you don't accept the scriptures and you don't accept the power of God, Jesus says that is the root of your problem. It is not because you can't believe, it is that you refuse to believe. Your problem isn't that it's hard to understand or that you can't understand. The real problem is that you refuse to understand. You don't know the scriptures, you don't know the power of the God who wrote those scriptures. Because if God is God, then of course God has got life after death sorted. Of course he has, because he knows exactly what he is doing. And that's why any denial of resurrection life is a denial of God's word and God's power. And Jesus says this is a serious error. So as we close now on our third point, we've seen challenging the resurrection, we've seen Jesus clarifying the resurrection. Let's now just apply the resurrection to us. How does all of this apply to you and to me? Well, the obvious answer is it applies to all of us because we all die. And so if you are a Christian believer, you'll be convinced of the resurrection and the hope that it gives you in the face of death. But perhaps you're skeptical and you can't accept the idea of resurrection. Or maybe you just don't believe and you won't accept the

resurrection.

Well, wherever you're at, please don't stop investigating this claim, which is the central claim to Christianity that Jesus Christ rose from death and there is hope for all who believe in him after death. How do we know this? Well, one important lesson from this episode is basically know the scriptures because it's in them, in our Bibles, that we find all the answers to our doubts, to our prejudices, to our life experience. And so what we find in here in the scripture should shape our thinking more than anything else should shape our thinking, more than books or family or anything else.

And so we don't need to speculate about the afterlife. We don't need to speculate about any aspect of life or any of the big questions of life because we can know by knowing what the scriptures actually say.

[24 : 24] We can make sense of all of our questions. We can get reasoned answers and we can get clarity for all of our confusion by knowing the scriptures. All of our theological errors, bar none, 100%, all come because we have a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Bible. But by reading and by meditating on the scriptures, convinced of the power of the author, that will help us to know the truth and to avoid error.

And it will also transform our lives forever because this is not a dead word. It is a living word that God uses to change us. And so Jesus wants us to know the scriptures and the power of God. And he gives us reasons for believing there is a resurrection from death for those who know God. And that is the main point of this whole passage. But there's even more convincing evidence because soon after this confrontation that Jesus had with the Sadducees, Jesus was sentenced to death on a cross where he willingly gave up his life to pay for our sin against the God who made us. And yet death wasn't the end for Jesus because God raised him to life again. And so the claim that Jesus was resurrected from death is at the very heart of Christianity. Christianity stands or falls on the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. And so Mark wants to assure his readers, including us, that the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection is our only hope in life and death. And so we can be confident not just because of the scriptures and the power of God, but because of the resurrection of Jesus. Because Jesus backed up everything he said by being resurrected from death. He didn't just talk about the resurrection. Jesus is the resurrection. He said, I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this? The question is, do you believe this? Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and by believing in him that you one day will be resurrected too? Because Queen Elizabeth II certainly believed this. Listen to what she said in her 2020 Easter message. She said, the discovery of the risen Christ on the first Easter day gave his followers new hope and fresh purpose. And we can all take heart from this. So the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ means everyone who believes in him will be resurrected too. Believing in him, putting faith in Jesus Christ. And that is not blind faith. You know what blind faith is? Blind faith is if you're a Rangers supporter, believing that your team will win the Champions League. Never going to happen. Don't put your faith in Rangers to win the Champions League for you. Blind faith. Real faith is believing in something certain and sure. And the resurrection, your resurrection, my resurrection is not based on some kind of story that may or may not have happened a long time ago in a place far, far away. It is based on the reality that the Son of God entered into this world. He lived, he died, and he rose again. And one day he will return in power and glory. Believe in him. There is a certain and sure hope that because Jesus died and rose again, those who trust in him will rise too. We're talking about reality here. We're not talking about pie in the sky when you die. And so please do not be mistaken because there is no other religion, no other philosophy, no other worldview that gives you any hope in the face of death. Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no hope in the face of death. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. The one who came so that we may have life in all its fullness. Don't look for that life anywhere else. You won't find it. Go to Jesus, believe in him, and look forward to an eternity with a resurrected super body in God's presence, in a kingdom where there will be no more weeping or crying or pain or suffering. Isn't that the kind of existence you really want, you really long for?

Of course it is. It's only finding Jesus Christ. Believe in him.