

# Mark 12:18-27 Passing the Test

## Introduction

### Opening story

When I started university, I had no idea what I wanted to study. I just knew that it takes me hours and hours to write anything, so I shouldn't do anything related to English or any other subject that required a lot of writing. I thought to myself, science is OK, maybe I'll study that. So I enrolled in an organic chemistry class. That semester was hard – I had to study a lot. But by the time I got to the final exam – and this was probably the night right before the final exam – I started to feel OK, I'm understanding this. I'm reading through the textbook and it's starting to make sense to me. Maybe this could work.

But then I take the final exam, get it back, and see that I did horribly. I went to the professor to argue my results, but he just told me that the grade I got was what I deserved. I didn't even understand his explanations for why I did so badly, only that it was very clear that what I understood was not at all what the right answers were. That was the most dangerous part – I thought I had a good understanding of the subject when in fact, I was completely off. But in the end, it was a good learning experience – it showed me that in addition to the humanities, I shouldn't go into the sciences either.

### The main message and its importance

Now, in today's passage, we see a similar lesson. Jesus tells the Sadducees that what they thought they knew was wrong. In my case, it's OK to do poorly in school – I survived my bad chemistry grade. But having the wrong answers for life's most important questions, like what happens after we die? That is completely different. Our problem is that there are many possible answers to these important questions, but there's only one true answer and if we don't know it, there are eternal consequences.

The main point from today's message is that we will get life's important questions wrong when we don't know the Scriptures or the power of God. Again, we will get life's important questions completely wrong, which means we won't know why we're here, who God is, who we are, or what happens after we die, if we don't know the Bible and believe in God.

Today, Jesus instructs us to where we find the right answers. Let's listen to Him.

## The Sadducees test Jesus

### Test logistics: What was the context?

Today's passage is from the book of Mark, one of the 4 books in the Bible about Jesus' life. For those of you who are new today, it is our custom at CBIBC to go verse-by-verse through the Bible so we can study God's complete revelation to us and not just skip to parts that are easiest to understand.

The setting for today's passage is in Jerusalem on Wednesday in the middle of the Passover week. Jesus is 2 days from being crucified on the cross. During this week, Jesus had driven out all who were buying and selling in the temple. He was opposing and shaking up the existing religious system. The crowds enjoyed hearing Jesus' instruction because it was something new, but the religious authorities did not like Jesus. A few verses above our passage, Mark 12:12 says "And they [the religious leaders] were

seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them.”

Jesus had publicly criticized the religious leaders with a parable. They wanted to arrest Jesus, but couldn't because the crowds supported Him. So, the religious leaders created tests to publicly trap Jesus in front of the crowds.

In Pastor Shannon's last sermon, He preached on the first test where the Pharisees and Herodians tried a political trap. They tried to get Jesus to pick sides, for or against the Roman government, but Jesus answered the Pharisees expertly.

As the Pharisees are leaving, we come immediately to today's passage. This is the second test, where another group, the Sadducees, try to trap Jesus with a theological test.

### Testers: Who were the Sadducees?

Now, who were the Sadducees? In Jesus' day, there were two main groups in Israel's religious leadership. The Pharisees were one group, and the Sadducees were the other. You can think of them as the group of deacons, or pastors, or cardinals who were very wealthy, had influence, and controlled the religious system. The two groups were the experts and the authority on religious matters. And the two groups differed from each other on certain beliefs.

There are two characteristics of the Sadducees that we should know. Firstly, the Sadducees only believed in the books of Moses, while the Pharisees believed the whole Old Testament. The books of Moses are the first 5 books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Only these books mattered to the Sadducees, so that is why they test Jesus using Deuteronomy and why Jesus later uses a passage from Exodus.

The second characteristic is mentioned in the passage – the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. They believed that both body and soul ended at death – that there is no after-life. The Pharisees, on the other hand, did believe in life after death. This was the major controversial topic between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And this was where the Sadducees tried to trap Jesus.

### Test: What was the trap?

Let's look at the test. The Sadducees explain a weird story about 7 brothers all marrying the same woman and dying. It is based on 6 verses in Deuteronomy where Moses teaches that an unmarried brother should help preserve his brother's name. This would ensure that the family line would continue and any land would stay within the family. This was an optional practice that was probably rarely done even back then. The Sadducees don't have a problem with the instruction, but are instead using it to create an ingenious trap for Jesus.

The trap is to get Jesus to take sides in the controversial topic. They expected Him to respond in certain ways, all of which would create major problems. Here are some answers Jesus could have said:

- "There is no resurrection", which would alienate everyone who believed in the resurrection, which was likely the majority at the time.
- "She is the wife of all the brothers", which would have created an immoral, disgusting scenario and enable the Sadducees to say that the resurrection was ridiculous

- "She is the wife of a particular brother", which they would have followed up and forced Jesus into a lengthy argument that there's no way he could prove that conclusion and so discredit His authority

The Sadducees thought that whatever Jesus would say, they could discredit Him.

## Jesus grades the Sadducees (and us)

### Final grade: 'Fail' because of ignorance of the Scriptures and the power of God

However, even though the Sadducees gave the test, Jesus gave them the final grade. Jesus didn't respond how they thought He would. Instead, He corrected their false assumptions.

Jesus said in verse 24, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?". This evaluation was shocking because remember, the Sadducees were the religious leaders and the so-called experts of the Scriptures. It's like saying that a chemistry professor doesn't know chemistry.

Jesus was pointing out that the Sadducees knew of the Scriptures, but lacked a correct understanding. It's like people who study the Bible as nice words or literature, but reject its many claims to be the truth of God. Our understanding will be wrong if our assumptions are wrong. And so it was with the Sadducees. They ignored parts of the Bible, held to wrong assumptions, and as a result Jesus gave them a failing grade.

Now, what does it mean to know the Scriptures and the power of God? Knowing the Scriptures means that you know the Bible is not merely a man-made book but is truth revealed by God to man. Knowing the power of God means you believe that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth and has the power to even raise people from the dead.

These two phrases are closely linked. We know the Scriptures only by the power of God, because God's truth in the Bible is foolish to the world unless He opens our eyes by His power to see its wisdom. And the Scriptures record God's mighty deeds and provide the clearest view of the power of God. Jesus fully understood both the Scriptures and the power of God and could therefore see that the Sadducees did not understand either one.

### Answer 1: Jesus explains the nature of the resurrection

After giving the overall grade, Jesus answers the Sadducees' question using the Scriptures and the power of God. He explained both the nature and the reality of the resurrection.

In verse 25, Jesus said, "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." The Sadducees assumed that if there was a resurrection, then the afterlife will be just like this life. But Jesus knew that God could not only raise people from the dead, but could also give us new natures and new bodies. Jesus explained that in the resurrection our relationships will be perfect and marriage will not be needed. Thinking about it is like a caterpillar trying to understand life as a butterfly – it's hard to imagine what life will be like then.

### Answer 2: Jesus explains the reality of the resurrection

In verses 26 and 27, Jesus explains that the resurrection will happen. His argument is very dense and very deep. It is not based on the verb tense. The summary is that if God committed to protect Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob during their lives but failed to deliver them from the final enemy of death, then His protection and love is limited. Instead, in God's commitment to protect His people, He would not leave them dead and forgotten, but would raise them from the dead. It would take another sermon to fully unpack this argument, but the main point is that Jesus uses His full understanding of the Bible to show that there is absolutely life after death.

Jesus concludes his grading of the Sadducees by saying a second time that they are wrong – and not just slightly wrong, but greatly wrong. They were wrong about the fact of the resurrection, the nature of the resurrection, their ability to outsmart Jesus, who Jesus truly was, and their understanding of the Scriptures.

## Conclusion

### Do the right answers really matter?

Now, let's take a step back and ask, does it really matter that the Sadducees were wrong? Today, when there are so many different beliefs about life's important questions, we might be tempted to think that it doesn't really matter what we believe. Isn't it enough that the Sadducees or anyone else is sincere in their beliefs?

Unfortunately, no. Just like on my chemistry exam, I thought I knew the right answers but in the end, I was wrong. It didn't matter if I felt like I was right; I still got a bad grade. And if we're wrong in the important questions in life, then we will live wrong and will face eternal consequences.

Take a moment and realize that Jesus is being kind to the Sadducees. He could have left them in their error and let them find out for themselves that there is life after death. But He takes the time to point out their flawed thinking. That gave them the chance to correct where they were wrong. We should all likewise examine ourselves while there is time and consider whether we have the right answers.

### What non-Christians need to know about the Scriptures and the power of God

What are the right answers? Jesus says they're found in knowing the Scriptures and the power of God. But what is it that we specifically must know? If today you are not a Christian, then it's simple – you must know the gospel. The Scriptures explain the gospel. And the gospel "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

The gospel message is that God created the heavens and the earth. He is perfectly loving and holy, which means that He must punish sin. God made man, but all of us break God's Law and as a result, will face God's eternal punishment when we die. But in God's mercy, He provides a way for us to be saved from His judgment through Jesus Christ. Jesus is fully God and fully man. He lived a perfect life, but died on the cross to voluntarily take our punishment in our place. He was resurrected from the dead and now freely offers eternal life, but only if we repent of our sins and trust in Him. If you believe in Him today, you will be saved.

### What Christians need to know about the Scriptures and the power of God

For the Christian, you already believe the gospel and know the Scriptures and the power of God. But ask yourself, are you barely passing the test? Or are you passing with full marks?

Remember, the Bible is a lamp to our feet. It makes wise the simple. It is more precious than gold. Remember that you who are saved have the Holy Spirit in you to help you understand His Word. It's not a duty that we must do – knowing the Scriptures and the power of God is our privilege!

When we do so, we'll gain a deeper understanding of who God is, the mighty works He has done, and what He will do in the future. Think of how well you'll be able to live your life, especially through difficult times, when you deeply know your Savior.

There are many ways you can increase your understanding: you could read the Bible, listen to it preached, memorize it, study it, and meditate on it. I challenge you today to consider the one thing you will do to increase your understanding of the Scriptures and the power of God.

This is God's desire for all of us and He will bless our efforts if we depend on Him. Let's go to Him now.