**THE GOD OF THE LIVING**

***Mark 12:13-27***

***“He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken.” (v. 27)***

To begin this passage, we should go back to when Jesus cleansed the temple. It was at this point that the Sanhedrin members began looking for a way to kill him. They feared him because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching (11:18). When Jesus taught the parable of the tenants, they started looking for a way to arrest him. But they failed. Now in chapter 12, the Pharisees, Herodians and Sadducees approached Jesus to try to trap Jesus in his own words to alienate him from the crowd. But Jesus answered with such great wisdom that they were totally defeated. Jesus did more than win arguments. Jesus taught vital spiritual truth that edified his people. Let’s listen to Jesus’ words of wisdom so that we may meet the living God and live as his people.

1. **Give Back to God what is God’s (13-17)**

Let’s begin this passage by reading verse 13, ***“Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.”*** Jesus’ first opponents were a team composed of Pharisees and Herodians. What is funny is that these two groups were political enemies because the Pharisees were anti-Rome and the Herodians were pro-Rome. But together they collaborated to trap Jesus whom they regarded as a common threat to their establishments.

As they approached Jesus, they disguised their malicious intention by using flattery. However, they spoke the truth about Jesus. They said, ***“Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth” (14a).*** The truth was that Jesus was a man of integrity. He was sinless, without blemish or defect (1Pe 1:19). He was perfectly pure. Because of these characteristics, Jesus taught the truth. He didn’t teach what people wanted to hear, but what they needed to hear. Because of that he was hated and persecuted. But he was not swayed by anyone. When he later stood before Pilate, Jesus said, *“You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (Jn 18:37)*. Jesus is the King of truth. If we are on the side of truth, we must listen to Jesus and proclaim the truth. Surely, we will be hated. But in this way, we can learn of Jesus and become people of integrity like Jesus.

After trying to flatter Jesus, they set their trap: ***“Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn’t we?” (14b-15a)*** They pressed him to say “yes” or “no.” If Jesus said “yes,” then he would alienate the crowd. No one likes to pay tax. The imperial tax was especially irritating the Jews because it represented their submission to a foreign power and this hurt their pride as God’s chosen people. If Jesus said “no,” the Herodians would arrest him right away and the Roman authority would eliminate him as a rebel. It seems Jesus had no way out. The Pharisees must have smiled as they thought, “We have got you now!”

Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and saw the trap. Jesus said, ***“Why are you trying to trap me...Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.” (15b)*** A denarius was a Roman silver coin about the same size of an American dime. Yet it was worth a day’s wages of a laborer. It had portraits and inscription of the Roman emperors. In Jesus’ time, the inscription read “Tiberius Caesar, Son of the divine Augustus.” Taxes were to be paid by denarii in honor of the Roman lordship. They brought the coin, and Jesus asked them, ***“Whose image is this? And whose inscription?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then Jesus said to them, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” (16-17)***

What do Jesus words, ***“Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s”*** mean? This means that people should carry out our basic duties as citizens even under any system of government. Remember, that God has established governing authority (Ro 13:1). And that He established governments for our good (13:4). Jesus did not oppose paying taxes to Caesar because Jesus knew that Caesar’s authority came from God. It is God who is the one who raises rulers and deposes them to fulfill His own will and purpose (Dan 4:17). As citizens we need to pay tax, serve jury duty, vote, and in the time of war, serve in the military. Doing our basic duty as citizens is essential to be Christian witnesses in our community.

What do Jesus’ words, ***“Give back to God what is God’s”*** mean? Not only do we have an obligation to the government that He established, but we have an obligation to God. When we get right down to it, everything belongs to God, even our own lives because He is the Creator, Provider and Sovereign Ruler. As the denarius had Caesar’s portray, each of us bears the image of God. So as an acknowledgement of God’s right of all things, He wants us to offer two things. One thing we must offer our tithe. It is not because He needs the money, but this is our expression of acknowledgment that we respect and love Him, so that He may bless us even more. Malachi 3:10 says, *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.*”

Another way is by offering ourselves to God. Romans 12:1 says, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”* How can we offer ourselves to God? One way we can offer ourselves is by giving our hearts, minds, souls and strengths to God. When we give our inmost beings to God, we become more like Him and we can grow in our intimate relationships with God. As we live out this principle we can bear the fruit of God’s image in our lives. A second way is by offering our love to God and others. When we love God, we are opening our hearts, minds, souls, and strengths to God. We are giving God the first place in our lives. God is worthy of our best and first priority in using our time, money, and lives. He already gave His best, the one and only Son, Jesus Christ. But we must not neglect our love for others too. By loving others, we are offering our lives to God’s creation, whom He loved. By loving others, we are acknowledging His ownership over other’s lives. Lastly, we can offer ourselves by giving our lives for God’s glory. This could be through sincere repentance when we have placed an idol as first place in our hearts, like a certain sin, a certain hobby or even ourselves. This also could be by giving our certain talents to God that He has blessed us with so that we can use them to not only glorify God but to expand His kingdom through them. This could be using our talents as teachers to teach the Bible, and it could be offering our talent of encouragement to bless those who need encouraging. Also, if we are blessed with money, we could use it to bless the needy. Whatever we have, we should use it to bless those around us to glorify and praise the God who gave them to us. May the Spirit guide us to give our heart, love, talents and money to God as an offering to God that is pleasing to Him.

There is a wonderful young woman by the name of Katie Davis who living by this principle of giving to God what is God’s. Katie grew up in a Christian home and went to Church regularly. In December of 2006, when she was 17 and a senior in high school, her and her mother went to Uganda as short-term missionaries to volunteer for three weeks in a home for abandoned or orphaned babies. When she returned to the United States, she knew she wanted to return to Uganda for good as a missionary for orphaned children. Then in the summer of 2007, she returned to Uganda as a missionary. Katie offered up her life to Christ out of her love for him. She would willingly “quit her life” as a high school class president, home-coming queen and top of her class. She also quit her life dating cute boys and dressing up in cute clothes. She also gave up driving her cute sports car. Not only that, she would quit her dream of going to college, disappointing her parents in the process, and breaking her little brother’s heart that she was leaving. She “quit this life” to eventually become the legal mother of 13 orphaned children in Uganda. She also, through her ministry “Amazima” she feeds and schools hundreds of other children while teaching them the word of Jesus Christ. She has offered her life to God out of her love for Jesus, who did not spare his own life for her and purchased her by his precious blood.

1. **God is the God of the Living (18-27)**

After soundly defeating the Pharisees and Herodians, a new opponent came to oppose Jesus. They were the Sadducees. Who were the Sadducees? The Sadducees were the party of the high priest and his associates. They were most interested in administration of the temple. They were wealthy and political. They rejected extra-biblical traditions, such as the traditions of the elders and the oral law. They embraced only the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, as their canon. Since the word “resurrection” was not explicitly mentioned in the Pentateuch, they said that there was no resurrection (18). They also did not believe in any spiritual realities, such as spirits, angels, and the immortality of the soul (Ac 23:8). Though they appeared to serve God, they were practical atheists. As a result, their main concern was only security and prosperity in this world.

To ridicule the resurrection, they concocted a weird story based on Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and brought it to Jesus. There were seven brothers. When the oldest one came of age, he married a woman. But suddenly he contracted a strange disease and died without having a child. Then, according to Moses’ law, the second son married the widow. But then he died accidentally, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In this way, all seven married the woman and died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman, who seemed to be a source of curse for the family, also died. After telling this terrible story, the Sadducees asked Jesus, ***“At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”*** (23) This story reflected their thoughts of those confined to the visible world. Their story reflected their barrenness, hopelessness and death. They were pessimistic and fatalistic under the power of death. They were so miserable. Thus, according to their logic, there should not be a resurrection.

What was Jesus’ answer to their question? Jesus replied, ***“Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?”*** Jesus did not sugar coat his answer. He revealed that they were wrong. They were wrong for two reasons: they didn’t know the word of God and they didn’t know the power of God.

Let’s look at the two reasons more closely. **First, they didn’t know the word of God.** Jesus knew that one of their root problem was that they did not know the Scriptures. Of course, they read the Pentateuch so many times and even memorized it. But they tried to understand it only intellectually, by their own reason. So, they did not catch the spiritual meaning and they did not meet God through His words. The Apostle Paul said, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” (2Ti 3:16)* The words of God written in the Scriptures are God-breathed. The Scriptures were spoken through human beings who were fully inspired by the Holy Spirit (2Pe 1:21). Therefore, without the help of the Holy Spirit we cannot understand the Bible (1Cor 2:13-14). When we study the Bible, we need the Holy Spirit’s help. When we depend on him with humility and earnest spiritual desire like a little child, the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth (Jn 16:13). On the other hand, if we analyze the words of God only with human reason we cannot discover the life in them. It is because the word of God is living and active. When we stand before the Scripture, we cannot hide anything, because it is God's word. So, without a humble and repentant heart, nobody can understand it. That's why the Sadducees who were self-claimed experts in the Bible, but still could not know the Scriptures.

**Second, they didn’t know the power of God.** What is the power of God that Sadducees didn’t understand? It is God’s creation power. Through his word, God Almighty created this universe out of nothing. Faith in Creation is fundamental to faith in the resurrection. Without faith in the creation power of God, how can anyone believe in the resurrection. Therefore, Christian faith stands on faith in God's creation. Nobody who does not believe God's creation can have faith in God. If we believe in God who created the heavens and the earth, it is not hard to imagine that God will raise his people from the dead, because the resurrection power is God's power of re-creation.

These two errors formed the reason why the Sadducees didn’t understand nor believe in the resurrection. Therefore, for God’s people to have resurrection faith, it starts with faith in God’s word and in His creation power. Jesus corrected the Sadducees’ error regarding marriage and the resurrection very clearly in verse 25, ***“When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.”*** God has almighty power not only to raise the dead, but to transform our lowly bodies into glorious spiritual bodies (Php 3:21). When God created human beings, He gave us bodies fit to live in this world and we need to marry in order to procreate (Mal 2:15). But in heaven we no longer need to marry. There will be no more desire to marry and no more struggles among married couples. We will be like the angels in heaven: pure, holy, free from all kinds of carnal desires and physical limitations, wholly devoted to God, full of love and joy and peace. There will be no more marks of aging such as wrinkles and baldness, no more disease—such as cancer—no more pain, no more death, no more mourning. We will be imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1Cor 15:42-44). In short we will all be like Jesus (1Jn 3:2).

In order to support his teaching, Jesus quoted from Exodus, one of the books of the Pentateuch, saying, ***“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’” (26).*** God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. When Moses encountered God, the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were already dead in this world several centuries ago. If the patriarchs were dead and no more, God should have said, “I was the God of Abraham.” But God used the present tense, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” It proves that the patriarchs are alive in God and enjoying their personal relationship with him in the spiritual realm. Here Jesus affirms the existence of the angels and the reality of the resurrection and eternal life in the kingdom of God.

Why then is faith in the resurrection important? When people don't know the Scripture or the power of God, they can be badly mistaken about God and themselves. Then the meaning of life becomes clouded and distorted, and directionless with only selfish motive. Also, people put their hope in worldly treasures and work hard for meaningless things. Finally, the power of sin and fear of death take hold of our lives making people slaves to the world without hope. In the end, this is life without God. Therefore, resurrection faith gives true hope of a new life in the coming kingdom of God where all things will be made anew. The hope of the resurrection also motivates us to die my old self and live a new life in Christ. Thus it leads our continual change in the image of Jesus when we live by faith.

Resurrection faith could not stand without the knowledge that God is living. Look at verse 27, ***“He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken.”*** Our God is not the God of the dead, who keeps a distance from us and looks at us without love and heart. He is not the God who doesn't care for us and can do nothing for us. For the dead, life has no meaning. The dead” are those who do not have faith in God like the Sadducees. To people like them, everything is dark and tragic and miserable. Death is the end of everything. There is no true hope or vision. Their way of thinking is dead. They are always negative and pessimistic. Though they are physically alive, they are actually as good as dead. They cannot see God or experience the power of God. Nietzsche, who was a German philosopher (1844-1900), said “God is dead.” But God said, “Nietzsche is dead.”

Rather, our God is the God of the living. He is the God who can give life to those who believe in him. He is the God who gives us new life and meaning, new hope and vision for us. In Him, we can find the meaning of our lives. In Him, we have thousands of reasons to live a joyful, beautiful and fruitful life. “The living” refers to those who have faith in God. They are full of spirit in their words and actions. Their lives are vibrant and dynamic. They are full of hope and vision. They are joyful and thankful and positive, finding some possibility in any situation. Through their faith God works out His salvation purpose. Are we living or dead? It is easy for us to limit God in our reason and experience. God is beyond our reason and experience. God is the Almighty and Eternal God. Nothing is impossible with God. He can do abundantly more than all we ask or imagine. If we feel dead or frustrated, the problem is not God, but us. We need to honestly ask ourselves, “Am I living by faith in the living God, or not?” God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Our lives will bear much fruit when we truly experience the God of the living. May the Spirit guide us to experience the God of the Living.

Through this passage, we learned that we are created by God so we should give to God what is His. Also, through resurrection faith, we can meet the Living God and truly meaningful and fruitful lives.