

# Hard Knock Wife

Mark 12:18-27 June 10, 2026

They say there are no stupid questions. But there are some contenders. If a tree falls in the forest, does it make a noise? How does a thermos know whether to keep stuff hot or cold? Is cereal soup?

Like 8% of American men, I'm colorblind. I always love when people who've never known a colorblind person ask questions about it. It doesn't mean I see in black and white. It's much less exciting than that. Colorblindness is a decreased ability to differentiate between colors and shades.

Once, in college, colorblindness came up and I was outed. A fellow student looked puzzled and said, "So, you're red-green colorblind? How do you know if you've cut yourself?"

It's a silly question, but it was asked with genuine curiosity. If someone is asking something honestly, asking because they're seeking an answer, asking because they want to understand, *that's* when it's good to say there are no stupid questions. But when the Sadducees came to question Jesus in Mark 12, it's a stupid question. Because the entire basis and direction of their whole belief system was totally wrong. Jesus will point that out twice as He answers them.

But part of what Jesus says is pretty hard to swallow. At least for those who are happily married. So, let's look at this text, see what the Lord reveals, and talk about what that means for our futures.

## **Mark 12:18 - Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him and questioned him:**

The Sadducees were aristocrats. They were much fewer in number than the Pharisees, but had a lot of influence.<sup>1</sup> They were politically liberal, had lots of wealth, and were cozy with Rome.<sup>2</sup>

But they were also distinct in their theology. You see, they only accepted the books of Moses, rejecting everything else, including the oral traditions the Pharisees obsessed over.<sup>3</sup> They not only didn't believe in any resurrection after death, but also didn't believe in spirit or angels.<sup>4</sup>

So, they swagger up to Jesus to ask them a question. But unlike the previous askers, they're less about trapping Him and more about ridiculing Him.<sup>5</sup> They're not impressed with Jesus. They don't respect Him as a teacher. At least among the Pharisees every now and then you had someone who at least respected Jesus. Not so among the Sadducees.

## **Mark 12:19-23 - <sup>19</sup> "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife behind but no child, that man should take the wife and raise up offspring for his brother.**

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Wessel *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

<sup>2</sup> James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Volume 23: Mark*

<sup>3</sup> John Walvoord and Roy Zuck *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*

<sup>4</sup> Acts 23:8

<sup>5</sup> Morna Hooker *The Gospel According To Saint Mark*

**<sup>20</sup> There were seven brothers. The first married a woman, and dying, left no offspring. <sup>21</sup> The second also took her, and he died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. <sup>22</sup> None of the seven left offspring. Last of all, the woman died too. <sup>23</sup> In the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be, since the seven had married her?"**

This isn't an honest question on any level. They don't believe in a resurrection at all. But Sadducees and Pharisees were often at odds. They would often debate. This question undoubtedly was one they would throw at the Pharisees. Because the Pharisees believed in the resurrection, *but* they believed that things pretty much carried over from *this* life to the next. The relationships all carried over. They even thought that physical defects carried over into the afterlife.<sup>6</sup>

So, Sadducees would antagonize them with this hypothetical. Likely the Pharisees said the woman would belong to the *first* husband. Yes, the brothers were supposed to provide an heir. But, under the Levirate system, once you produce a male son for your brother's name and inheritance, you had no duty to keep treating your sister-in-law as a wife.<sup>7</sup> And the Levirate relationship was not seen as on par with regular marriage.<sup>8</sup>

Now, the Sadducees are using this ludicrous question to try to ridicule belief in a resurrection from the dead. But, you know, when we're figuring out what we think about doctrinal issues, it can be a good thing to run some thought experiments to see how that doctrine would play out.

Let's say I ascribe to a doctrine that says *in order to be a Christian* you must demonstrate a certain gift of the Spirit. Ok. What about those individuals who are physically unable to do so? Does that mean they can't be true Christians?

Or, if I ascribe to a doctrine about how God does things, but as I take it to its logical conclusion it means that God must be a moral monster or that *His* version of "love" is totally different than anything we would ever categorize as love, well then I don't think *God* is the problem, I think my *doctrine* is the problem.

So listen: Doctrine matters. It matters a *lot*. That's one of the conclusions we get from this text. And our interpretations of the Bible should be able to withstand scrutiny. There *will* be times where we cannot understand something. Where we'll have to say, "It's a mystery we don't totally apprehend yet." But God is a God of order, not confusion. He is a God Who reveals. He gives us His word so *that* we can know Who He is, what He does, *how* He does things, His character, His nature. And our doctrines - meaning our beliefs and teachings - must line up with His character and nature.

**Mark 12:24 - <sup>24</sup> Jesus spoke to them, "Isn't this the reason why you're mistaken: you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God?"**

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<sup>6</sup> Brooks

<sup>7</sup> Ben Witherington *The Gospel Of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

<sup>8</sup> Witherington

Jesus is very direct. The term He used for “mistaken” means “you’re deceiving yourselves.”<sup>9</sup> It’s a term that refers to the wandering of sheep.<sup>10</sup>

He tells them they were *totally* wrong. And *here’s why* they’re wrong: First, they didn’t know the Scriptures. They rejected 34 of the 39 books of the Old Testament. Meaning at *their* time, they were missing out on 88% of what God revealed - at least book-wise.

We need the whole counsel of the word of God. We need to *study* the word of God. We need to regularly read it. And then read it again. And then read it again. We need to dive into the text of Scripture as daily bread. And it’s important we don’t neglect areas we’re not interested in.

But it’s not *only* about studying. Jesus said the Sadducees were also wrong because they didn’t know the power of God. Both aspects are essential. Knowledge *and* power. You see, the Pharisees had knowledge. Jesus once said to them, “You *pore* over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them...but you are not willing to come to *Me* so that you may have life.”<sup>11</sup>

We can’t only have a head relationship with the Bible. We have to have a heart relationship with the Lord. We must be born again. Made new to know truth and receive power.

**Mark 12:25 - <sup>25</sup> For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven.**

Jesus states flatly that the resurrection is obviously true. That angels are real. The Sadducees rejected *both* of these things. Jesus doesn’t bother trying to convince them, He just says, “They’re real.” And their denial of angels is all the more ridiculous when you consider how many times we see angels in Genesis and the other books of Moses! But these guys weren’t submitted to God’s word and so even their interpretation of the books they *liked* was way off track.

Sometimes you’ll hear it said that the Jews didn’t really have a developed understanding of the afterlife. Now, a great portion of what happens after death *does* come to us in the New Testament. But there are multiple references to resurrection in the Old Testament. Daniel 12:2, Isaiah 26:19, Job 19:25-27. The Sadducees didn’t *read* those books, but it’s there. They *needed* those books so they could have a full-fledged theology.

**Mark 12:26-27 - <sup>26</sup> And as for the dead being raised—haven’t you read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God said to him: I am the God of Abraham and 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.”**

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<sup>9</sup> BKC

<sup>10</sup> Marvin Vincent *Word Studies In The New Testament*

<sup>11</sup> John 5:39-40

*Badly* mistaken. Doctrine matters. Now listen: There are a lot of *important* doctrines that are not *essential* doctrines. What I mean is that there are things we believe and teach, things we really care about deeply, but they're not *essential* for salvation. Some doctrines *are* essential. If you deny the Trinity, you're not a Christian. If you believe that God the Father was once a man and has a body of flesh and bones, and that Jesus is a created being, you're not a Christian.

But there are doctrines that, while important, are not essential. We shouldn't pronounce every person who differs with us on a non-essential as a heretic. At the same time, the reason why we make it a priority to study and understand the word is so that we are *not* living life "badly mistaken." The Sadducees' misunderstanding of Scripture messed up the rest of their identity and activity.

Now, to answer the question, Jesus went to the books of Moses. "You guys trust Moses? Let's see what *he* said." When God spoke at the burning bush, He said He *is* the God of these patriarchs who died centuries before. Not He *was* their God, but that He *is* their God. They were still alive.

On top of that, God promised these patriarchs that He would help them. That He would protect and provide for them. "Oh, except when it comes to death, your *biggest* enemy. Sorry." Well, that's just silly! God is a *Savior*, not just in the Gospels, but from Genesis 3 - from the *moment* humanity brought death into the world. Did they *really* think God isn't going to save us from *death*? And if not, why oh why didn't God save the patriarchs from the many *temporal* difficulties they faced?

If there is no resurrection, if we just cease to exist like the Sadducees said,<sup>12</sup> why bother worshipping God, following God, obeying God at all? There's no point. In 1 Corinthians Paul says: If all we have is *this* life, then we should be pitied more than anyone! Your faith is absolutely worthless.<sup>13</sup>

But there *is* a resurrection. Every single person here is going to come out of the grave one day. As Daniel says: "Some to eternal life, some to eternal contempt."<sup>14</sup> So which group are you a part of? Eternity is coming. You have an appointment with death. Listen to Jesus, Who said:

**John 5:24 - <sup>24</sup> "Truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.**

So believe the truth and receive the power of everlasting life. And allow your life to be shaped by the truth of God's word, day by day as He works His power through you day by day.

As we close, I would like to take a moment to talk about what Jesus said in verse 25. I don't know about you, but I am *troubled* by that verse on the human level. I love my wife. Is she really just going to be a stranger to me in eternity? Just another citizen of heaven?

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<sup>12</sup> William Lane *The Gospel Of Mark*

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:17-19

<sup>14</sup> Daniel 12:2

Now, let me say, I trust God. I know that what God intends for us in eternity is *better* than good. It is beyond what we could ever ask or imagine. And many old things *will* be done away with in heaven - *but not everything*. Many of you sitting here beside your spouse - your soulmate. Is God *really* just going to erase that?

It's possible. The plain reading of Jesus' words give us that impression. But I would like to give us a few things to think about. First, marriage is *incredibly* important to God. It's the *first* relationship He instituted in the Garden - *before* the fall. He sees it as a *covenant*.<sup>15</sup> He is very upset when that covenant is broken. He says that *He* joins husband and wife together and let *no man* separate it.<sup>16</sup>

Second, *marriage* is a major theme in heaven passages. The *marriage* of the Lamb. The Bride prepared for Him. New Jerusalem is described as a bride.<sup>17</sup> Now, for that reason, some commentators say, "Well, marriage in this life is just a signpost pointing to our ultimate relationship with Jesus."<sup>18</sup> And, I get it. In heaven, there's no more temple because *Jesus* is our temple. There's no more sun or moon because *Jesus* is our light. Isaiah 54 says, your Maker is your Husband.<sup>19</sup>

But here's the thing: *Some* relationships *do* carry over into eternity. Revelation 21-22 references *nations* multiple times. David expected to enter eternity still in relation to the baby son he lost.<sup>20</sup> We aren't stripped of our identities in heaven. And in Song of Songs, speaking of marital love, we're told love is *as strong* as death.<sup>21</sup>

So, all this to say, I don't think it's quite as easy as just saying, "Marriage is erased." I'm certainly not trying to cancel out what Jesus said here. Of course not. That would be making the same mistake the Sadducees made. But there's a *lot* we don't know about the eternal state.

Listen to what one Bible scholar wrote on this issue:

*"The use of the terms [married] and [given in marriage] is important...these terms refer to the gender-specific roles played in early Jewish society by the man and the woman in the process of getting married...Mark has Jesus saying that no new marriages will be initiated in the eschatological state. This is surely not the same as claiming that all existing marriages will disappear in [eternity]."*<sup>22</sup>

Tertullian, who lived in the late 100s and early 200s, and did much to defend the Church against Gnostic heresy, and proclaim the doctrine of the Trinity, also held to the persistence of holy unions into eternity.<sup>23</sup> His position was that in eternity "all the more shall we be bound" to our believing

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<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 2:17, Malachi 2:14

<sup>16</sup> Mark 10:9

<sup>17</sup> Revelation 21:9

<sup>18</sup> Randy Alcorn *Heaven*

<sup>19</sup> Isaiah 54:7

<sup>20</sup> 2 Samuel 12:23

<sup>21</sup> Song of Songs 8:6

<sup>22</sup> Witherington

<sup>23</sup> Tertullian *On Monogamy* 10

spouses. He wrote, "In eternal life God will no more separate those whom he has joined together than in this life where he forbids them to be separated."

So, I am not trying to plant a flag on a certain doctrine. However, I do think it is profitable to consider an issue like this, knowing God can be trusted, His way is always perfect, and He will never disappoint. But sometimes we allow ourselves to hold a doctrine without thinking it all the way through. Whether it's marriage or salvation or gifts of the Spirit or end times, we want to be a thinking people. A studying people. A people who grow in our knowledge of what *God* has revealed so that we can live in *His* power until we step *from* this life to the next.