



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 12:13-27

Mark

“Taxes and the Resurrection”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, our passage this morning is Mark chapter 12 and we will look at verses 13 through 27.

“Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. They came and said to Him, ‘Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay or shall we not pay?’ But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, ‘Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at.’ They brought *one*. And He said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ And they said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ And He said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ And they were amazed at Him.

“*Some* Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Him, and *began* questioning Him, saying, ‘Teacher, Moses wrote for us a law that IF A MAN’S BROTHER DIES and leaves behind a wife AND LEAVES NO CHILD, HIS BROTHER SHOULD TAKE THE WIFE AND RAISE UP OFFSPRING TO HIS BROTHER. There were seven brothers; and the first one took a wife, and died leaving no offspring. The second one took her, and died leaving behind no offspring; and the third likewise; and *so* all seven left no offspring. Last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one’s wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God? For when they rise from the

dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the *passage* about *the burning* bush, how God spoke to him, saying, "I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, and the God of Jacob"? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken.' "

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Shall we pray?

Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for this great privilege we have to come together and study the Scriptures. And we are reminded in the statement that our Lord said to the Sadducees that error comes from not believing the Scriptures, from not understanding them, not understanding the power of God. And yet, as we do study them, as we apply ourselves to Your Word, we do learn of your great promises and Your ability to fulfill them all and Your faithfulness to fulfill them all. And we pray that as we consider the text that we will take up this morning that You would bless us in an understanding of those truths, and that we might draw closer to You, One who keeps His promises and One who has made wonderful promises and has made provision for everything in the person and work of Your Son.

Thank You for that. We pray that You would bless our time this morning, that we would come to appreciate it more, come to avail ourselves of the great privilege we have to draw close to the throne of grace. We do that now, Father, not only praying for ourselves for personal diligence in the study of Scripture and in the life of obedience, but praying also for our friends and for members of this assembly. And we pray for them, some in great need, physical difficulties, sickness. And we pray that You would give healing and encouragement. Pray for financial blessings to those who are in need. Pray for all of the men who labor week in, week out. The difficulties of that, the drain of it, the demands that are put upon people these days in the workplace, and we pray that You would give energy and that You would give perspective and the desire to, in spite of the difficulties, and in spite of the demands, to undertake, to study, and to think, and to pray, and to fellowship with the saints. We pray for blessing in these ways.

We pray for the church in other ways. We pray for the teachers, the Sunday school teachers and the secretaries, all who labor in this church and in the physical as

well as the spiritual aspects of it. Give strength and give encouragement. It is a blessing, Father, and we appreciate their ministry. Pray that You would raise up others to continue in that ministry.

We pray for our nation. We pray for our government and this city, and this area, and government of our state, and government that You have placed over this nation as a whole. We pray for President Clinton and for his cabinet, for the senate and the congress and the courts, all those who are in authority over us, Father, we ask Your blessings upon them, that You would give wisdom, that You would give guidance and that You would give a sense to them of their need to look to You. Bless, Father, and turn the heart of the king.

Bless us now, Father, as we look at the Scriptures and we consider the things that Mark has recorded for us and these events in our Lord's life. Prepare our hearts for the week to come. Give us a zeal for Your truth and for Your life. Bless us, we pray, in the name of our Savior, Amen.

It's often said that two things you never discuss in polite company are religion and politics, but we have no choice but to discuss them this morning because they are subjects of our passage, which I've entitled "Taxes and the Resurrection." Not a very imaginative title, is it? We look for scintillating titles when we try to sum up the lesson that we're going to teach and I confess I didn't come up with one this morning. But the subject is rather scintillating. What can be more stimulating than a topic on the eternal destiny of the body and soul? Which is the subject of the resurrection. And then, of course, taxes. Everybody's got an opinion on taxes. We feel pretty deeply about that.

You remember the first time you paid your income tax? I do. It's etched on my mind. I went into the accountant's office in ignorant bliss. I thought, "Maybe I'll pay a little. Probably I'll get something back." So I sat down and he explained a few things to me and went over what he had done. And then he handed me this sheet of paper with the facts and the figures and the amount. And the room began to swim and I said, "This can't be right." And he said, "It's right." In fact, he even smiled when he said it to me. He didn't say anything like, "I feel your pain." He didn't feel my pain. He was delighted. He'd done his work and I think that was the day I became a man. I know it was the day I entered into adulthood and the responsibilities of it. But

it's never fun to pay taxes. Revolutions have started over taxation. Political fortunes have risen and fallen over taxation. It's a very emotional subject, a very explosive subject, and that's the reason it's in our passage this morning, for that very reason.

It's Tuesday the last week of our Lord's life. This is the day of questions and the Lord's enemies both political and religious have joined forces to try to destroy Him, and their strategy in this is to trap Him in difficult questions. The first attempt came from a group of high officials, some priests, scribes, and elders, members of the Sanhedrin who approached the Lord in a very direct way. They had a question which was something of a demand. They wanted to know by what authority He did the things that He did. Well, the purpose of their question was to catch Him in an answer that in some way would be incriminating, either with the Roman officials if He claimed authority that would be in conflict with them, or if He denied any divine authority that would cause Him to lose some influence with the people.

Well, that was their attempt, but as you'll remember from last week, they failed miserably in it, frustrated, angry, they withdrew. They regrouped. And they decided on a different tactic. The direct approach had failed, and so here they tried the indirect approach and they send a new group. And we read in verse 13, "They sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement." Now, if there was ever an odd couple, this is the odd couple because these patient hated each other. We know the Pharisees. We see them throughout the gospels. We're very familiar with this party. They were the teachers. They were the rabbis of the people, the men of the synagogue. They were fastidious about keeping the laws and their traditions, and they were emphatic about that. They were the religious party.

The Herodians, however, are a group that we're not nearly as familiar with. They are the opposite of the Pharisees. These men were cosmopolitan. They were worldly men. They were politicians, men who were connected to the house of Herod and to the fortunes of that family. They were men who liked things Greek and Roman. They had a like for pagan art and architecture and athletics: things secular. They were political men, as I said. They were not religious men, and they were interested primarily in the status quo and keeping things as they were.

So this was a strange mix. As William Hendrickson puts it, "a coalition of the sanctimonious and the sacrilegious." But the Pharisees saw their influence slipping

with the Lord's increasing popularity with the people, and the Herodians had been alarmed by the political overtones of His increasing popularity and feared a reaction from the Romans. They all feared, as John records in John 11, that they would lose their place. And so they joined together, these natural enemies. They put those differences aside to unite against what they considered a common enemy. And instead of a blunt challenge like the first group, these men veil their challenge in flattery, pretending to be hopelessly deadlocked over a question that was both theological and political, and acting as though He was the One that they were looking to solve this problem that they had.

And they begin in a very flattering way. Verse 14, they recognize Him as "Teacher," and they call Him, "truthful." A man who spoke the truth to all regardless of their station in life, a man who was no respecter of persons, and it was all true. Everything they said was correct. But their purpose in saying it was not to speak truth, but to disarm Him and draw Him into their trap. As the Proverb says, "A flattering mouth works ruin." and that was their intention when they asked the question, "Is it lawful to pay a poll tax to Caesar? Should we pay it or should we not pay it?" That's their question, a question that was a very difficult issue in that day.

As I said, it's never an enjoyable thing to pay taxes. It's an emotional issue with many people and that was particularly the case with these people. Since the early part of the first century, the Romans had required of the Jews payment of tribute money that went directly into the emperor's treasury. And it was very offensive to the Jews because it was a reminder to them that they were a subject people. They didn't govern themselves. These weren't the days of King David and Solomon. This wasn't the time of glory when they were an autonomous state.

They were ruled from distant Rome. They were under the heel of the Gentiles and they hated that. In fact, they hated it so much that some groups, the Zealots, a party that was very nationalistic, refused to pay the tax altogether. They were early tax protesters. The Pharisees, they hated the tax. They would pay it, but they hated it. Now then the Herodians, they supported it. So you have these two groups: one that hates it and one that supports it, and they bring this issue to the Lord.

It was a religious issue. It was a moral issue. It was very much a political issue. And those things tend to get mixed up together. They do so with us, as well.

Political things, to some degree, have a spiritual element to them, but it's very difficult to put our politics aside for spiritual matters. And sometimes political interests even take precedence over spiritual concerns. And that was certainly the case in our Lord's day and over this matter, and that's what makes this such a clever question on their part.

If He said, "Yes, pay the tax," then He would discredit Himself with the people, make them angry because they hated the tax. If He said, "No, don't pay the tax," then He would come in conflict with the Roman authorities and appear to be inciting a revolt, just as had occurred some years earlier with a man named Judas of Galilee, who had incited a revolt over this very issue. So they'd chosen their question well. But the Lord knew their hearts. Mark writes, "he knew their hypocrisy, and said to them, 'Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at.'"

Now, there were a variety of coins that circulated in Judea at this time, but it was the denarius that held the answer to their question. On one side, it had the likeness of Caesar portraying him as the divine son of the god Augustus, and it bore the inscription, "Tiberius Caesar Augustus," son of divine Augustus. On the other side of the coin was the inscription, "Pontifex Maximus," which meant he was the chief priest of Rome. Both sides of the coin were expressions of the emperor cult and claimed divine honors for this man, this king, whom they hated. So you can see why it was so offensive to the Jews, why it would have been offensive to the early church, why it would have been offensive to any of us to see something like that.

And so the Lord takes this coin in His hand, and He looks at it, and then He asks the question, "'Whose likeness and inscription is this?'" And they said to Him, 'Caesar's.' " The answer is so obvious it probably caused them to pause for a moment, wondering why He'd ask that, puzzle over His purpose, but it gave Him the opportunity to ask His question, or make His statement, rather, give His answer, which is stated in verse 17, "'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'" And they were amazed at Him."

The simplicity of His answer was startling. If it's owed to Caesar, pay it to Caesar. And we do owe Caesar. We may not like that and we may not like to make payments to Caesar, but we have our obligations to the state. Paul makes that very clear in Romans chapter 13, where he states that government is a minister of God. It

was divinely instituted basically to do three things: first of all to establish peace, then to maintain order, and thirdly to administer justice. And those benefits are great benefits for a society. We cannot progress as a society if we don't have peace and order. And if there is not some semblance of justice that's established. We need that. The church needs that. That's why we're to pray for the king. We're to seek to live in an orderly state. And yet, to provide those benefits – and they are great benefits – there is a price tag, and the citizens must accept the responsibility of paying for it. Government is to be respected and it's to be obeyed.

Can it abuse its power? Can it tax to extreme and enslave both physically and economically? Of course it can. Government often becomes a tyrant. The 20th century bears witness to the dangers of stateism, where the government controls everything. If you doubt that – and I doubt that any of you do – but if you should, travel to eastern Europe and you can see the wreck and ruin that such systems have left behind them, have put those countries in debt and put them back far from any kind of progress for years to come.

But the Lord doesn't get into any of that, doesn't take up the political issues of His day. His concern was not with political matters and solving political problems and reforming the empire or any of that. His concern was with spiritual matters, and He quickly moves to that. "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, –" and that coin was Caesar's. It had his image on it. It showed his ownership. But whose image did Caesar bear? The image of God. And so God had a claim on Caesar as He does on all men. He's our creator. He's our master. We're made in His image and so we're to render "to God the things that are God's."

And what things are God's? Everything. Everything we have, everything we are belongs to God. We tend to forget that. We tend to think, "Well, it's my body. It's my money. It's my time. I can use these things the way I want to use them." The Corinthians were thinking in that way, and Paul had to write to them about this matter and remind them that it was not so. "Don't you know that you're not your own?" he writes, 1 Corinthians 6:4. "You have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." You don't own yourself. God owns you. You are His. You are His by virtue of creation and you bear his image and that shows his ownership. But for those who have put their faith in Christ for the church of Jesus Christ, there is

something even more important and that is we are bought by Him, bought out of slavery to sin, purchased by the blood of His Son. And in so because we bear not only His image, but the blood of His Son, we owe Him everything and we are to glorify Him in everything.

Later, in chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians, Paul picks up on this again and he writes, "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men." He's not speaking literally there of slavery, and there were probably some men in Corinth to whom he was writing who were slaves. He's speaking here of a temper of mind, a disposition, and saying in effect, "Don't accept unquestioningly the system of man, the system that you see around you. Don't live according to the ways of the world. Don't be a man-pleaser. Don't live for men." Those who do that have the mentality of a slave. You may be free politically and economically, but if you're living according to men and their demands, and according to their standards, then you're a slave to those men.

We're bought with a price. We're owned by the Lord and His desires are to be our desires. His ways are to be our ways. And when they're not, then we become slaves to other things, to our employment, and improper work habits, to men when we begin to desire the things that the world desires and aspire to its goals. That's what happens when we allow our thoughts and our conduct to be governed by the ways of men rather than to allow them to be governed by Christ, and His truth, and the Scriptures. We're to glorify Him in all that we do.

Young people, your bodies are not your own. They belong to God. They belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether you're a believer in Him or not, they don't belong to you. They belong to God. But if you put your trust in Jesus Christ, how much more? The same is true for the adults, for us parents. Same is true for us. We're not our own. And so we should ask ourselves such questions as are we doing what we do to the glory of God as Paul instructs us? Are we investing in this life that's going to pass away? Or are we living our lives in such a way that we're investing in eternity and things that will never pass away? How are we using our time and our energy? In front of the television?

A lot of time and a lot of energy are – if we can call it energy – is spent in front of the television. I'm not against television. I think it has its place. But from what I understand, there's too much time being spent there. Are we spending it there

or are we spending it in study, in prayer, in seeking to cultivate our relationship with the Lord? Spending some time in that. I know that the demands of the marketplace and in the home and all are very much upon us. Great demands put upon us. But are we spending any time doing these kind of things?

Those are the questions that we need to ask ourselves and they're implicit in the Lord's statement "Render to God the things that are God's." You see, the Jews had not done that, and that was the reason that they were paying that hated tax to Caesar. Down through their history, they had refused to submit themselves to God and to give themselves to His service. They had rebelled. They had gone their own way. They had not lived in submission to God with the result that they had become a subject people. You read it from the beginning to the end. They're being subjected to the slavery of one nation or another: slaves to the Egyptians, slaves to various Canaanite peoples after they entered the land, slaves to the Philistines, slaves to the Babylonians, and the Persians, and the Greeks, and then as we come to our text, to the Romans. Ignoring God, going our own way, that's the way to slavery. Slavery of one kind or another.

God owns us. The stamp of ownership is on us. We bear His image. And every believer has been bought by the price of His blood, the blood of His Son. So we owe Him everything: our time, our families, our energy, our loyalty. We have our obligations to Caesar, have our obligations to the government. That's very clear from what the Lord said. But when the authority of the governor comes in conflict with the authority of God, the choice is very clear. And nobody said it better than Peter, when he and John were standing before the Sanhedrin and they had been warned not to preach this gospel about Jesus Christ. They said – at least Peter said speaking for both – "With all due respect, we must obey God rather than man."

And throughout the Scriptures you have examples of men and women who have taken their stand in those difficult situations, put their life on the line, refusing to submit to the government. Not refusing to serve the government in legitimate ways, but refusing to worship the government. You have it in Scripture. You have it in church history. And that's the choice that's put before us. If the two conflict, we must serve God. Oftentimes, they don't conflict. They don't necessarily conflict. But when they do, we must obey God.

And that's the Lord's answer, which solved the problem. He could not be cited for sedition because He affirmed the rights and authority of the state within certain divinely ordained limits. On the other hand, he could not be accused of tolerating Caesar's blasphemy because by drawing a clear distinction between Caesar and God, He denied Caesar's claim to deity and exposed it as idolatry. So the Lord solves the problem and He does it in an answer that's simple, that's complete with a result that they were amazed at Him. For the second time, they had failed to trap the Lord, but they don't give up at this point.

Another group now comes forward. This time, the Sadducees. We don't know very much about the Sadducees, but they were a small party. Josephus describes the Sadducees as well-educated men, men who held positions of power and prominence in the city of Jerusalem. They were urbane. They were sophisticated. They were wealthy. They were the party of the aristocracy, not the party of the people. And they were a party that were in very strong conflict with the Pharisees, and that because the two had totally different theologies. The Sadducees did not recognize as authoritative the traditions that the Pharisees held so strongly to, the traditions that they valued so highly. They based their doctrines on the Pentateuch, on the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; and yet they didn't really believe all of that, either.

But what they held as authoritative was the first five books. And they discounted so much of what the Bible taught and what the Pharisees themselves believed. They didn't believe in the resurrection. That's what Mark tells us here. They didn't believe in angels. They didn't believe in the human spirit. They didn't believe in immortality. Luke records a debate that takes place between the Pharisees and the Sadducees in Acts 23:8 and you see those differences brought out in that debate that they were having. They were materialists, and yet they joined with the Pharisees because they, too, saw a common enemy in the Lord and they thought they could trip Him up with their question.

They come to the Lord with a theological conundrum, a puzzle that they had thought up about the resurrection. It was a question that was designed to produce ridicule rather than provoke thought, along the lines of the question that people sometimes ask, "Can God make a rock too big for Him to lift?" Now their question

was more biblical than that one, but it's a question that has some basis in the Scripture because it's developed from the provision that Moses set forth in Deuteronomy 25, which required that if a man dies childless, his brother was to marry his widow. It was known as the levirate law, or the levirate marriage, from the Latin word lever, which means brother-in-law. The widow's brother-in-law would marry her to give her protection and in order to raise up children to his deceased brother and in so doing, ensure that his family line would continue. It's one of those odd laws of the Old Testament that we find difficult to understand and relate to, but one of those kind of laws that they could seize upon, the Sadducees, and from it develop a hypothetical situation that they thought would be very problematic for a person who believed in the resurrection.

And so they set the problem before the Lord, and we read in verse 20, "There were seven brothers; and the first one took a wife, and died leaving no offspring. The second one took her, and died leaving behind no offspring; and the third likewise; and *so* all seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman died, too." And then their question in verse 23. "In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife."

Now again, as I pointed out, this is not a question that's designed to lead into any kind of understanding. It's designed to provoke ridicule, and they probably had invented this to confound the Pharisees, and evidently had had some success with it because they come to the Lord and they ask Him thinking they will confound Him, as well. And so they ask their question. They put the problem before Him. Then they wait for His response.

His response was direct. The problem was not with the resurrection, but with their understanding of the resurrection. They didn't know what they were talking about. They were ignorant of the Bible, ignorant of theology, and as a result, they had invented a problem that didn't exist. As He says, "You do not understand the Scriptures." That's the reason for your problem. They clearly teach the resurrection. If you study the Scriptures, if you believe the Scriptures, you'd understand these things. But further, they didn't understand the power of God, who was capable of raising the dead.

Now, He develops the second point first, the idea of the power of God, by stating that the power of God will bring about a completely new form of existence with the resurrection. The life to come is not going to be like this present life. Don't analyze what's coming by your experience in the present. You can't do that. As He says in verse 25, "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." In other words, what holds true in this world doesn't hold true in the world to come. It's going to be a completely different order. Then we will be like angels. We will be eternal. We won't die. And since marriage is for the preserving and propagating of the race, there will be no need for marriage.

Now, I think we need to be careful in considering verse 25 not to press too much the analogy between our future existence and that of the angels. The reality is the Lord doesn't say a great deal about what we're going to be like and what we're going to experience there. He says very little about the resurrection life, so it's hard to build a great deal of theology around this one point that He makes. And the reason for that is very understandable. It's a good reason. And the reason is we don't have the capability to understand what that future life is going to be like, and we haven't the comprehension of it, can't understand it.

Trying to explain heaven and the resurrection body and the world to come is a little like explaining television and radio to some primitive tribe in a distant jungle. They can't understand those principles. They can't understand the idea of radio waves. I can't understand them. But they certainly couldn't understand that. Then explain how there's a man in a box who's not really there. They wouldn't be able to comprehend that because their thinking is limited by the small scope of their world and their experience. And our capacity to understand heavenly things is restricted by our limitedness. How can we understand what we've never seen, what we've never experienced?

And so for the Sadducees to deny the resurrection because it doesn't fit their experience, because it doesn't fit what they see around them is a little bit like primitive tribesmen denying the existence of radio because it doesn't fit their experience. There are many things that do not fit our experience that are true and many things spiritual that we cannot comprehend. The only way we will arrive at an

understanding of them, even a shallow understanding of them, which is the best we will ever have in this life, is by revelation. God must inform us what He knows to be true but what we cannot see or hear or understand because we cannot see it. It's beyond us. And He does that through His revelation and we receive it by faith. And His revelation is the Word of God, and so we must be students of the Word of God, receive it by faith.

These men that He's speaking with here, these Sadducees, are not men of faith. They were rationalists. They didn't rely on God's revelation. They relied on their own reason, on their own thinking. And so naturally, they didn't understand the power of God and they didn't understand the Scriptures. That didn't keep the Lord from citing the Scripture to them. He doesn't avoid the Scriptures because they're skeptical of the Scriptures. He goes right to the Word of God because this is the Word of God and there's nothing more effective than the Word of God in dealing with men.

In verse 26, He directs them to Exodus 3:6, where the resurrection is clearly implied. Now, He could have cited other texts. He could have cited Psalm 16:10, "For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol; Neither will Thou allow Thy Holy One to see the pit." And there are other passages from the Bible that teach the resurrection. But since the Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch as authoritative, He goes to the second book of the Pentateuch, the second book of the Bible, the book of Exodus, to show that that area of Scripture that they said they held as authoritative taught the very doctrine that they denied, the resurrection. It's a well-known passage. It's the passage in which God speaks to Moses out of the burning bush and tells Moses to go back to Egypt, where He would lead His people out of slavery. And when the Lord first speaks to Moses, He introduces Himself by identifying Himself. And He identifies Himself with the words, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Now that's what the Lord quotes in verse 26, and then adds in verse 27, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Now that is often explained as a proof for the resurrection by emphasizing the words "I am" and understanding them to mean that though the patriarchs had died some 400 years earlier, God said, "I am their God," not "I was their God." So if they had died and ceased to exist, as the

Sadducees would have maintained, He couldn't have said, "I am their God." By saying, "I am their God," He's saying I'm presently their God, which indicates that they still exist. Their souls are immortal.

Now from that, it is understood that the implication is that because their souls are immortal, they will be physically raised from the dead. Now all of that is true, but it may be proving too much from that statement in Exodus chapter 3. It's at least to my mind not clear that the immortality of the soul necessarily implies a resurrection of the body. After all, the Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, but they rejected any notion of a resurrection. They thought that was foolish. I think the resurrection is implied in the words of our Lord when He says that He is the God of the living and His power is such that it is greater than death. It can overcome the grave. God is that great. God is that powerful.

But probably the emphasis here should be put on the words "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," which were intended to remind Moses of the covenant that he had made with the patriarchs. Now earlier in the book of Exodus, in fact, just a few verses previous at the end of chapter 2, when the Israelites were groaning under the toil of their slavery, we read that God heard their groaning and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now that covenant that He made with them was an unconditional covenant and it had many promises, among them the promise that the land of Canaan would be the possession of God's people, of Abraham's descendants.

And in chapter 15 of Genesis, He had told Abraham that his descendants would go down into a foreign land and they would be slaves there for 400 years, but that He would bring them up at the end of that time, and they would possess the land of Canaan. And as we come to the book of Exodus, that's what God is preparing to do, and that's what He does, and that's what that book is about. But He had principally made that promise of land to Abraham and repeated that promise to Isaac and to Jacob. And back in Genesis 13, if you remember, Abraham and Lot had a dispute and so they separated, and Abraham, being a man of faith and being a generous man, gave Lot the first choice. And Lot, being a fleshly man, an earthly man, a believing man, but a man whose heart and whose eyes were on the earth chose

the lush green valley of Sodom, and he moved down there and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

And that left Abraham with the Negev. It left him with the more barren areas of the land of Canaan. As he stood there alone, without much, without anything, for that matter, God speaks to him and He tells him at that moment to look to the north, look to the south, look to the east, look to the west and then walk throughout the land, the length and the breadth of it. For, He says, "All the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever." Now when did Abraham receive that land? He didn't. Never did. In fact, the only land that Abraham owned was a plot at Machpelah, where he bought a grave and buried his wife, Sarah. As he described himself to the people of the land He said, "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you." And that's how he died. The same is true of Isaac. The same true of Jacob. They died without having that land.

Now did God fail? Did He fail in His promises? No. There are some things that God cannot do. God is infinite. God is unchangeable. His power is unlimited. He's omnipotent, as well as omnipresent. But there are some things God cannot do. God cannot do the irrational. He cannot make a rock too big for Him to lift. He doesn't deal with absurdities. And God cannot lie. The author of Hebrews tells us that. It is impossible for God to lie. And when He makes promises to His people, He keeps them.

But how can He keep the promise of land to a dead man? There's only one way He can do that, and that's to raise Him from the dead. And so the resurrection is the implication of the statement that the Lord made to Moses. The promise of the covenant has not failed. All those promises that are made will be fulfilled. So when Christ quotes Exodus 3:6, and then adds He is the God of the living, He's saying that those men, though they have died and been dead for a long time, they still have a future. God will raise them from the dead that they will receive the promises that He made to them. He is a covenant-keeping God. He cannot lie. And His power is so great that it can overcome death itself and raise even the dust of this body to a whole and glorious body.

As I was looking over this lesson this morning and considering what we would go over in the time together, a story occurred to me. I didn't read it recently. I've

heard this. Perhaps you've heard it, as well. And I'm constructing it from memory and it's supposedly a true story about a man who died – I believe it was in England – and he was buried, buried near an apple tree in the cemetery. The apple tree grew and over the years it began overtake the plot of land where it was, and it began to disturb the grave. So they exhumed the body and were going to transfer it somewhere else. The problem is they got into the grave and found that the roots of that tree had invaded the casket and consumed the body. It wasn't there. Got up into the tree and into the apples, and people have eaten the apples. It's kind of gross, but that's the story. And so the question is now what's going to happen to the resurrection? Same kind of question, you see?

But the problem with the person that would seriously ask that question is the same problem that the Sadducees have. You don't understand the power of God. You don't understand the Scriptures and the promises of Scripture. And if you understood the Scripture, you'd know the power of God. That's no problem for God. He knows everything. As I said, He's omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, everywhere and He knows everything. He knows where every atom is and He knows what will happen to every atom that makes up your body and it can't go anywhere and hide from God. He knows where it all is and He'll gather it up and He'll reconstruct it, not in its present form, but in a glorified form. He's that powerful and He's that great.

That's the God of the Bible. Those are the promises of the Bible. And had the Sadducees studied the Bible and believed the Bible, they wouldn't have had any problem with the things that they bring before the Lord.

Well, again, that ended the discussion. Luke tells us that some of the scribes – probably Pharisees – said, "Teacher, You have spoken well." And I can imagine that they were amazed by the answer that He gave because that problem, that conundrum had stumped them many times and they couldn't figure out an answer for it, and here He figured it out or gave them the answer from a passage they've probably read 100 times but never seen the resurrection in Exodus 3. So they appreciated what He'd done, and they said, "You have spoken well." He'd solved the problem and left the Sadducees speechless. They had no response. He had demonstrated to them the resurrection from the nature of God, His power, and the promises of Scripture.

But He wasn't finished. At the end of the week, He would give the final proof of the resurrection with the resurrection of His own body from the dead. In fact, it's because of His resurrection that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all who have put their faith in Jesus Christ will enjoy that resurrection. And that's our hope. It's grounded in Him, grounded in the one who really lived, who really died, and who has really been raised from the dead. And that is a hope that will not disappoint.

Longfellow wrote, "Our hearts, like muffled drums, are beating Funeral marches to the grave." It's a good statement. "Our hearts, like muffled drums, are beating Funeral marches to the grave." We are all on a march, young and old, you children are on a march, and you're on a march to the grave. And you know what? You're closer to that end right now than you were when we began this lesson. We're always going closer. With each beat of our heart, we're closer to the end. And for many people, I think that would be a very discouraging thought. But it's not discouraging, not to those who have put their faith in Christ. We have nothing to fear in the grave because Christ has overcome the grave. And through Him, we not only have overcome that grave, but what awaits us is the resurrection to glory.

How glorious is it? Well, again, we don't have much on that. Paul doesn't say a great deal about the details of it. John doesn't say much, but John does give us a hint. He writes – and this is only a hint – "it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him just as He is." When He returns – and He will return – and we see Him, we will be changed, and we will be changed into the image of the glorious Son of God and we will bear that image and that glory. And John says, "Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself just as He is pure."

The hope of the resurrection should not only erase anxiety about death, but it should give perspective on the life that we're now living. It gave Abraham perspective. The author of Hebrews writes that "by faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, looking for the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God." He lived by faith. He didn't live for the present. He was responsible in the present, but he didn't live for the present. He lived for the future. He wasn't a slave of a manmade system or the aspirations of the world. He dwelt in tents, we're told. Never built a city, never built a house. The only thing he built were altars and

he built a tomb for his wife. His eyes were not on this world. They were on the world to come. He was looking for the kingdom to come.

Are you doing that? That's not to say that the present is unimportant. I'm not suggesting that. That's not to say that political and economic issues such as taxes, such as the kind of government that we have, that these things shouldn't be addressed. They should be addressed. And we should work for a just society, a free society in which men and women can advance themselves according to the biblical principles. We have those kind of obligations and some Christians have been called into that area of service, and it's a noble field of service.

But our hope is not in political solutions. It's not in economic prosperity. The best society that we can build will someday collapse. They all have and they will. If we amass a fortune, we will someday have to part with it. We cannot keep it. We cannot take it with us. So the question that I ask you, the question that I ask myself, the question we should all ask ourselves is what are we living for? How are we living? Are we living as aliens in a foreign land? Because if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, that is what you are. You're an alien here, but an alien only for a short time because the end will soon come. And when it does and our Lord returns, we shall see Him and we shall be just like Him.

Are you looking forward to that? Looking forward to our Lord's return? Do you know Him as your Savior? Have you believed in Him? Or are you a citizen of this world, tied to this earth, your future bound to the future of this world? That's a discouraging thought, because if that's the case, then you are a citizen of the city of destruction. And the exhortation I give to you is the one that John gave to the religious leaders of his day. "Flee the wrath to come." Flee the city of destruction. Flee to Christ, who is the Savior from sin, the Savior from death. Flee to Him. Believe in Him as Savior and Lord. May God help you to do that. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we are reminded of great truths in this passage. We face difficulties in this life. We don't like things that are happening around us. We don't like the tax burdens and other things that happen. As the Psalmist writes in Psalm 11, words that seem so applicable to our day, the foundations are failing, they're crumbling, and we don't know what to do at times. And yet, what

we do is look to You, trust in You. And we're reminded by this passage that You are One to be trusted. You are not the God of the dead, but of the living. And we praise You for being a God of that power, One who sent His Son to submit to death, to be overcome by death, but then conquered death and conquered the grave with the resurrection. And we praise You and thank You for the fact that that is our future, as well, in Jesus Christ. We pray that if there be any in attendance this morning who do not know Christ as Savior, who are citizens of this world, give them the understanding of the peril of their situation and bring them to faith in Jesus Christ. We pray these things in our Savior's name, Amen.