

Living in Light of Eternity

Mark 12:18-27

October 7-8, 2017

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As we consider the massacre that took place in Las Vegas this past week, many emotions rise to the surface and numerous questions remain unanswered.

Here are some that come to mind.

- It bothers us that a motive for these senseless murders has been so elusive.
- We've been reminded that horrific evil is a reality in our world. It was unnerving on Friday to hear that Stephen Paddock was born in Clinton, Iowa.
- We've witnessed the good in people who shielded loved ones and helped people they didn't even know. So many people offered to donate blood that they had to turn most of them away.
- We've also heard stories of sacrificial serving among first responders, dispatchers, police officers, fire fighters, EMTs, and medical personnel. I'm so glad we honored those who serve in our community at Awana this past Wednesday.

Like so many other selfless people on Sunday night, Taylor Winston, who has served our country as a Marine, didn't think twice about his own safety as bullets were raining down on the Harvest Music Festival. Here's what he said in an interview: *"I saw a field with a bunch of white trucks. I tested my luck to see if any of them had keys in it, first one we tried opening had keys sitting right there,"* he recalls. *"I started looking for people to take to the hospital. There was just too many and it was overwhelming how much blood was everywhere."*

One by one, injured victims packed themselves into the back seat and the truck bed before Taylor rushed them to the hospital in the stolen vehicle. *"Once we dropped them off, we were like well, let's go back for round two and go get some more,"* he said.

Almost 24 hours later, the owner of the truck was able to get in touch with Winston. This is what he texted: *"Hey Taylor, told you might have the keys to my truck?? All I want is the key. Other than that it's all water under the bridge to me...and how's the person you hauled doing?"*

Here's how Winston responded: *"I have em for ya. When do you want to meet for em? We're at the Monte Carlo. I took about 30 critically injured to the hospital. Your truck was extremely important saving those people's lives. I don't know if they all made it. Sorry about doing so and all the blood."*

How are we to respond to tragedies like this?

- Lament and mourning. We're called to weep with those who weep.
- Prayer for victims and for churches in Las Vegas as they reach out in the name of Jesus.

And here are five lessons I wrote down.

- Life is fragile and the stakes are eternal. James 4:14: ***"Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes."***
- Things are bad and will continue to get worse. Matthew 24:12: ***"And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold."***
- The gospel of Jesus Christ is the answer. John 14:27: ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."***
- The church must live on mission in the midst of all the mess. Philippians 2:14-16: ***"Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life."***
- Repent and receive Jesus Christ before it's too late. After people came to Jesus one day and pointed out two tragedies that had taken place, Jesus turned to them as they tried to make sense of it all and gave this response (he actually said it twice): ***"No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."*** (Luke 13:3, 5)

Here's what I want us to get today: *Let's live like we're dying...because we are. But let's also live like we're going to live forever...because we will...either in heaven or in hell.*

Events like this also cause us to ask questions.

- Why did this happen?
- Is this life all there is?

- What happened to those who were killed suddenly? When you listen to commentators you hear things like, “*so and so became an angel.*” Is that true? Do we become angels when we die?

Please turn to Mark 12 where Jesus addresses some of these questions. Let’s set the context. It’s now the last week of Jesus’ life and He is involved with a series of confrontations with the religious and political parties who are trying to take Him out.

After these groups are put in their place another group takes their best shot. Since a political ploy doesn’t work, the Sadducees try a spiritual stealth attack. They’re the spiritual snobs and the educational elite of the country and without a doubt they thought they could silence Jesus and put an end to His popularity among the people.

They were highly educated, extremely influential, very wealthy and were known as experts in the interpretation of Scripture. They held powerful positions, including that of chief priest and high priest. We could call them rich materialists who lived as if this life is all there is. They could be classified as religious liberals or even deists. People were impressed with them just like we are with those who are wealthy and influential today. Because they have no fear of judgment, they live as they please.

There are a couple things to keep in mind about them.

- **They only believed in the first five books of the Bible.** They were selective in what Scripture they considered authoritative. That’s still common today, isn’t it?
- **They did not believe in the resurrection, miracles, judgment, the afterlife, or angels.** They were selective in what doctrines they believed and therefore tended to live for the moment. Their philosophy could be described as, “*Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.*”

Josephus, the Jewish historian, described the Sadducees as being “*as rude as aliens.*” They were arrogant and aloof as they harshly passed judgment on others. That’s why they were “sad, you see?” (That was my attempt at a little humor). They considered themselves enlightened, but as we will see, Jesus is about to enlighten them.

In verse 18, we see that the Sadducees “**came**” to Him. The Sadducees are still upset about Jesus cleansing the temple because they controlled all the buying and selling there. Since they pride themselves on their intellectual acumen, they think they can finally stump Him.

Their set-up begins as they respectfully refer to Jesus as “**Teacher.**” And then they jump right in: “**Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.**” Moses was the great lawgiver and was universally accepted and respected by all Jews.

This is a reference to Deuteronomy 25:5 -- the part of the Bible that they believe: “**If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her.**” This is called *levirate marriage* (Latin for “*brother-in-law*”) and is what’s behind Judah taking Tamar as his wife in Genesis 38 and also gives the background to the kinsman redeemer as described in the Book of Ruth, which further ensured that Jesus would be born from the tribe of Judah.

The Sadducees describe a very hypothetical and even ludicrous situation, thinking they had a question Jesus could not answer and that He would look foolish even trying. This was doubly absurd since they didn’t even believe in the resurrection.

BTW, this was their go-to conundrum of a question that they had sprung on many others with great success. Here’s how they paint the situation in verses 20-22: “**There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died.**” The question everyone should be asking is what had she slipped into their falafel?

After all of the brothers die, then the woman dies too. Here’s their question in verse 23: “**In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.**” They were painting a problem, a theological sticky wicket. The question they ask is similar to, “*Can God make a rock so big that He cannot move it?*”

BTW, the Pharisees had already weighed in on this question by deciding that in such a situation the wife in the resurrection would be married to her first husband. Instead of siding with the Pharisees, Jesus answers their question with His own

question. Don't you love how He does this? I imagine their faces falling and their eyes looking around to see who was watching them.

Check out this convicting question in verse 24: ***“Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?”*** The word ***“wrong”*** means, *“to wander off course; to go aside from the right way.”* Jesus confronts their theological error quickly and clearly.

- **They didn't know the Word of God.** Even though they acted like they knew the Bible, they didn't accept all of it. On top of that, they didn't even understand the parts they did accept.
- **They didn't know the wonders of God.** While they believed God created the world they didn't believe He had the power to raise the dead. They essentially limited God by their own conception of rational possibilities. In short, they put God in a box.

Let's linger here a bit and point out that every error in life can be attributed to one of these two statements. Either we don't know the Bible or we don't believe in the power of God to do what He says He can do.

Jesus then does some teaching by pointing out that resurrection life is far different and better than this life in verse 25: ***“For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”*** With this one statement he punctures their proposition and takes the wind out of their sails. Did you catch the word ***“when”***? He doesn't say *if* the dead rise but *when* they rise. He simply states that physical and social relationships will pale in comparison to our relationship with the Lord.

In this one verse, Jesus establishes two tremendous truths:

- **Marriage is an earthly institution.** Marriage is designed to provide companionship (Genesis 2:18), to fulfill the need for intimacy (1 Corinthians 7:2) and to produce children (Genesis 1:22). None of this is necessary in heaven. 400 years ago, John Penny sat in a dungeon in the Tower of London. The day before his execution he wrote a letter to his wife and signed it this way: *“Husband for a season and your eternal brother.”*
- **Life will be different in heaven.** We don't become angels but we will be ***“like”*** them, in the sense that we will be sinless, glorified and eternal. Like

angels, we will obey completely and we will worship wholeheartedly. Like angels, we will enjoy an existence that transcends earthly limitations – we will no longer procreate and we will never die. We will never die, never hunger or thirst, we will not experience pain and we will no longer sin.

I like what Warren Wiersbe says about this passage: *“Resurrection is not the restoration of life as we know it; it is the entrance into a new life that is different.”* Heaven will be a completely different dimension than the life we now know. Weddings will not be performed because we will be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. We will certainly remember our spouse but every relationship we have here will pale in comparison to the relationship we will have with Jesus.

Here are a few things we know about heaven.

- **There will be no more sickness, sorrow, suffering or sin.** Revelation 21:4: *“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*
- **We will be given new bodies and minds.** 1 Corinthians 15:50: *“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.”*
- **We will be reunited with other believers who have died before us.** People will be able to tell it’s you and you’ll be able to recognize others – only we’ll be perfected and glorified. Moses and Elijah were recognized on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:4).
- **We will be with Jesus forever.** 2 Corinthians 5:8: *“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”* While the desire to be reunited with loved ones will be realized, this must take a backseat to being in the presence of God himself.

And then Christ clobbers them by crafting another question in verse 26 with a quote from the very section of Scripture they subscribe to in Exodus 3:3-6: *“And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, [this expects an affirmative answer because without doubt they were familiar with this story].*

Jesus is establishing a wonderful principle here. When talking to someone who doesn’t know Christ, it’s helpful to quote from the writings that they do accept as true to show that Jesus is who He says He is. For example, when talking to a Jewish person, I try to steer the conversation to Isaiah 53, which speaks of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant. When speaking to a Catholic, I quote John 3:3

from the Catholic Bible: ***“Jesus answered: ‘In all truth I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’*** When conversing with a Muslim, you could quote the Qur’an in Surah 19:19 which declares that Jesus is the *“holy son.”*

Now that Jesus has them thinking about the passage about Moses and the burning bush, He demolishes their doctrine of annihilation: ***“...how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’?”*** Four times in Exodus 3-4, God says, ***“I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”*** Since the patriarchs are still alive, though their bodies are in the ground, there must be such a thing as the resurrection. Notice this passage does not say ***“I was the God of...”*** but ***“I am the God of...”*** He is the God of the living because He is the living God. The patriarchs had been dead for many years, but God spoke about them in the present tense, as if they were alive, because they are.

By bringing up these three spiritual heroes, Jesus is also forcing them to remember that the wives of all three patriarchs were barren. Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel’s wombs were dead but God gave them life. God loves to bring life out of death.

Since God made promises to the patriarchs and these promises were not fulfilled during their lifetimes, when God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, He referred to himself as the God of the living, meaning He will fulfill His covenant promises.

On Tuesday night Beth and I went to the visitation for Annie Rauba. As we talked to Jerry while he stood next to her casket, it was obvious that his faith in the resurrection was giving him incredible comfort. Because he knows that Annie is more alive than she has ever been, he has been able to grieve with great hope. *His grief is raw and his hope is real because he believes in the reality of the resurrection!* On Wednesday at her funeral I made this statement: *“We often think that this is the land of the living, and that when we die we go to the land of the dead. The opposite is really true – this is the land of the dying, when our life here is over, we are transferred to the place of the living – either to a place of eternal joy or to a place of terrible torment.”*

Jesus doesn’t leave it there. In verse 24, He begins his answer by telling them that they ***“are wrong.”*** After making the Sadducees squirm by asking them a question, He takes it up a notch in verse 27: ***“You are quite wrong.”*** That means they were in extreme error and totally off track. Some preachers today avoid ending a

sermon on a sour note but the sermons of Jesus often ended on a note of correction or outright rebuke.

Here are two closing questions that come directly from this passage. We must answer them correctly or risk being in extreme error ourselves.

1. Do you know the Word of God? Jesus still asks this question: *“Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures...?”* How well do you know the Word of God? The Sadducees focused on social status more than the Scriptures, picking and choosing what they wanted from God’s Word. They probably had the Torah memorized but it hadn’t tenderized them.

A 2013 Lifeway Research study asked regular Protestant church attenders how often they read the Bible outside of church. While 19% answered, *“every day,”* 18% said, *“rarely or never.”* A quarter indicated they read the Bible a few times a week, and the rest answered, *“occasionally.”* Interestingly, 90% of this same group said, *“I desire to please and honor Jesus in all that I do.”* Let me just say that we will never be able to please and honor the Son of God if we’re not in the Word of God.

Researchers George Gallup and Jim Castelli put the problem squarely: *“Americans revere the Bible—but, by and large, they don’t read it. And because they don’t read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates.”*

Fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples. According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60 percent of Americans can’t name even five of the Ten Commandments. *“No wonder people break the Ten Commandments all the time. They don’t know what they are,”* said George Barna.

Please hear me. We’re not out to shame anyone. Instead, we want to help you. Do you know the Word of God? Are you reading the Bible everyday? That’s why we make a Bible reading guide available each month. If you don’t have a Study Bible, can I encourage you to get one? Make sure you’re doing whatever you can to become a student of the Word of God. Plug into a Sunday morning Growth Group and/or join a Growth Group that meets during the week.

2. Do you show the wonder of God? Jesus wants to know: *“Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?”* Has the information you’ve compiled led to the transformation of your

character? Do you know the passages *and* the power? At some point we must move from just learning the Bible to *living* the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:5 describes a group of people who know it but don't show it: ***“Having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”***

The Bible has a lot to say about God's power. Philippians 3:10: ***“That I may know him and the power of his resurrection...”*** The power of the resurrection comes only to those who personally know Christ through the rebirth. The word ***“know”*** in the Bible has more to do with experience than with intellect. After knowing we should be growing and then showing the power of God to others. We gather to grow *so that* we can give and go.

One of the survivors of the Las Vegas murders is Taylor Benge. He wasn't sure he was going to make it so he reached out to God in prayer while the bullets were flying. Here's how he put it in an interview on CNN: *“...I was agnostic going into that concert, I'm a firm believer in God now because there's no way that, you know, all that happened and I made it and I was blessed enough to still be alive here talking to you today.”*

Let's live like we're dying...because we are. But let's also live like we're going to live forever...because we will...either in heaven or in hell.

Communion brings us back to the cornerstone of our faith as we reflect on the life, death, resurrection, ascension and second coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! He is the God of the living because He is living!

The phrase, “Heads Up” is used a lot today.

- Like when a ball is coming toward your face (I don't know why you would look up if it's a line drive)

It can mean to “be alert” or to literally look up. It also means to have *“an advance warning of something.”* God wants us to have a “heads-up” about communion.

Listen to some communion correctives from 1 Corinthians 11.

1. Look up. ²⁷ ***“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.”***

2. Look within. 28 – *“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”*

3. Look around. ³³ *So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.*

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

²³ *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*

- Open communion
- Pick up two cups stacked together.
- Twist the top one to take them apart.
- Hold a cup in each hand and meditate while others are being served.
- We’ll then take the elements together – “co” – mmunion, to demonstrate our unity

Closing

As we leave, let’s live like we’re dying...because we are. But let’s also live like we’re going to live forever...because we will...and let’s take the gospel to those around us as we live on mission for the fame of His glorious name.