

God of the Living

Sunday, November 10, 2019 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown,
Iowa

Scripture: Luke 20:37-38

"But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him."

Introduction: In 2008, Katherine Grainger was part of the Great Britain's rowing team and she became famous in certain circles for sobbing uncontrollably on the podium because they won the silver and not the gold medal. She later described the experience as "like a bereavement" An article about her, and other world class athletes like her in London's Daily Mail, stated that scientists have found that silver medalists live shorter life spans because of their disappointment in coming so close to gold but not reaching it.*

I think that one of the applications of the passage we consider today is that it puts disappointment in context. The prospect of eternity lowers our expectations of this life and changes our priorities in light of Christ's death and resurrection. This life is a life on a fallen planet, with nothing as it should be. That we would suffer disappointments on this earth is not surprising, and there is more, much more, before us. All this comes into play when the Lord Jesus has yet another encounter with the religious authorities of His day.

Set the stage:

In an episode important enough to be recording in Matthew and Mark as well as Luke (20:27-39), Jesus encountered the Sadducees, an influential and wealthy group that accepted only the first five books of the Bible as inspired and did not believe in the resurrection. They posed a question based on a passage in Deuteronomy (25:5-6) that commanded a widow's brother in law to marry her. The idea was that the widow's extended family should help her and her children. They then posed a situation taken to the point of absurdity. What if a widow has seven brother in laws, and ends up marrying and surviving all seven? Who will be her husband in the resurrection?

The response of Jesus

The Lord Jesus responds by telling them that the argument of marriage is irrelevant because those in the resurrection are equal to the angels and are not married. Then He goes to a key section of the first five books of the Bible (the books of Moses) and challenges their refusal to acknowledge the resurrection. In the famous passage in which Moses meets God in the burning bush, God states that He is (not was) the

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Being a God of life, God should have used the past tense if these men, gone for centuries, were actually non-existent, but the present tense indicates that they are still alive. Resurrection life is at the heart of the Old Testament as well as the New.

The episode of the burning bush is fraught with disappointment

The fact that Jesus appealed to this passage is poignant to me because the whole episode of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt is painfully disappointing. God told Abraham in Genesis (15:13) that Israel would be oppressed in Egypt for 400 years, which means they knew it in advance. Can you imagine being an Israeli slave and finding out that your people have been slaves for 250 years; which means you have another 150 years to go? Peoples' hearts break in the Bible just like they do in real life, and even the Old Testament promise of resurrection taught by Jesus Himself points to this. We live in a fallen world and disappointment and trials are part of it. Don't be that surprised, and make your focus more on eternal priorities than on life's disappointments.

The content around this reveals priorities in light of eternity

In order to get a taste of the eternal priorities that should be our focus, look at the passages after Jesus' conversation with the Sadducees. He speaks of the His divinity as Messiah (20:41-44), the danger of living at the expense of the poor like the Scribes (20:45-47), and the importance of doing what you can, even if that is not much (21:1-4). They bring up better questions to ask when reviewing our days.

Conclusion

One of the universal challenges of life is dealing with disappointment, and I think this passage points us to a better understanding. The better values are that of the Resurrection, and they involve our Savior, helping those who suffer and doing what we can, even if that is not much. There will always be disappointments, discoveries that what we desire is "150 years down the road", but we do better to make the priorities more of a focus than the disappointments, because we serve the God of the living, and all are alive to Him.

* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6272009/Olympic-silver-medallists-die-younger-never-disappointment.html>