

We aim to reconcile people unto God through Christ

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| SERMON TITLE: | THE BLESSING OF KNOWING THE SCRIPTURES |
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Mark 12:24

- **“Is not this where you wander out of the way and go wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?”** (The Amplified Bible)
- **“You are mistaken, and surely this is the reason: you do not know either the scriptures or the power of God”** (The New English Bible)
- **“Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?”** (New King James)

This hard-hitting response by the Lord Jesus to a question posed by a group of Sadducees in **Mark 12:18** raises a very critical point for us, Christian believers of today, to ponder. What the Lord says is that those who, like the Sadducees He was conversing with, are ignorant of Scripture and the power of God face a very real risk and danger of living life in a manner that is removed from the very beneficial precepts of Scripture and that is not characterised by the demonstration and manifestation of God’s power. This is not a God-honouring life and not a life of victory but of defeat. This is a life in which, as in the case of unbelieving Nazareth, *“He (Jesus) could do no mighty work...”* (Mark 6:5).

Paul instructs Timothy (and us) to: *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth**”* (2 Timothy 2:15). We’ve got to be diligent in seeking to know and apply Scripture in matters of life. Why? Because *“**all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be **thoroughly equipped** for every good work**”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Because also: *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* (Psalm 119:105). Therefore, if we are not diligent to know Scripture, we will fumble and stumble in the dark!! Very much like the Sadducees that the Lord Jesus was having the exchange with.

Before we go further, let’s go back and examine the exchange a bit more. But just to clear one important point upfront, by the Lord’s grace you and I are unlike the Sadducees, who Paul tells us in Acts 23:8 *“...say that there is no resurrection – and no angel or spirit...”* So I am not suggesting any equivalence whatsoever between the Sadducees and us in denying the reality of resurrection and angels and spirits.

Indeed, *“the Sadducees were essentially secularists, a result of their exclusion of God (‘Fate’) from human affairs and their conviction that humans can expect nothing beyond this life”* (Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible). You and I are far from that. Otherwise, our faith would be in vain. So let’s be very clear about what I am and am not saying. The point I’m making is that if we are not diligent in seeking knowledge of Scripture and thereby to know the power of God, we are prone to making as grave an error as that of the Sadducees in areas that are critical to righteous and victorious living.

The question the Sadducees are putting to the Lord Jesus actually has nothing whatsoever to do with whose wife the woman in their invented and wildly exaggerated story will be after the resurrection, of the seven brothers that supposedly married her and left her childless. Although the Lord Jesus uses this ridiculous invention to teach an important truth, that *“For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven”* and that *“He is not the God of the dead but the God of the living”* His questioners are motivated

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not by a quest for truth but a cynical determination to ridicule whatever they consider the mindless belief in the notion of resurrection. To them, as Josephus tells us, *"the souls die with the bodies"* (Antiquities 18.1.4) and therefore nothing, not even the power of God, is capable of bringing about a re-unification of body and soul in resurrection. It's impossible! No power or force in the entire universe can do it. In other words, God possesses no supernatural powers that enable Him to do this, which is so humanly impossible. Besides, God is not involved in human affairs in any event. What error upon error!

Paul is concerned, and pleads, that we do not *"receive the grace of God in vain"* (2 Corinthians 6:1). If we are not diligent to know Scripture and the power of God, we risk receiving the grace of God in vain by not living righteously and producing the fruit that should accompany our repentance and confession of faith in Christ. What's more, we run the risk of not seeing God's power at work in our lives. Ultimately, the danger of *"having a form of godliness but denying its power"* (2 Timothy 3:5) through persistent behaviours that are contrary to Scripture becomes very real indeed.

In what ways might our lack of knowledge of Scripture and the power of God imperil us? For one, without knowledge of Scripture we are likely to fall short of Paul's injunction to *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ... (and to allow God to work in us) both to will and to do for His (God's) good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:12,13). In short, we are likely to live a life of disobedience in certain aspects of our lives.

Paul also cautions us about some who, for lack of knowledge of Scriptures and the power of God, rejected faith and good conscience and, as a consequence, *"suffered shipwreck"* in their faith (1 Timothy 1:18).

Let's look at two examples to illustrate the point. One example is those who do not have a godly perspective about wealth and material things. Paul says in their *"desire to be rich"*, they (1) fall into temptation and a snare, (2) fall into many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition (1 Timothy 6:9). This leads Paul to warn that *"... the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil"* and that, *"some have strayed from their faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"* (1 Timothy 6:10). Beloved, he is writing about believers! This is the serious risk we run if we are not diligent to know Scriptures and the power of God to meet our every need so we do not fall into the temptation of becoming haughty, trusting in uncertain riches rather than *"trust in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy"* (1 Timothy 6:17). So we yield to the temptation to hoard our material wealth instead of heeding the injunction to *"do good, be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing for (ourselves) a good foundation for the time to come, that (we) may lay hold of eternal life"* (1 Timothy 6:18,19). In other words, we risk exchanging eternal life for temporal riches!

Another example is our propensity to wallow in endless grief and lose hope – to the point of yielding to the temptation to point an accusing finger at and questioning the goodness of God, when we lose a loved one. Yes, losing a loved one is painful and there's nothing wrong with going through a certain measure of grief and mourning. But some of us can and do take it too far. To counter this, Paul sees it necessary to ensure that we are not *"ignorant concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest (we) sorrow as others who have no hope"* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). In other words, if we are ignorant of what Scriptures say about departed believers, we will experience sorrow that is similar to that of people who have no hope. In helping us gain a proper biblical perspective on this issue, the knowledge of Scriptures and our understanding of the power of God to grant eternal life to those that believe, enables us, instead of mourning forever, to *"comfort one another with these words"* (1 Thessalonians 4:18). Indeed, in the midst of our pain we declare together with the Spirit, *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes ... 'that they may rest from their labours, and their works follow them'"* (Revelation 14:13). From having no hope to comforting one another and declaring the blessedness of the dead!! That is the blessing of knowing Scriptures and the power of God.

So when we suffer any kind of loss or go through any difficulty, the knowledge of Scriptures and the power of God sustains us and gives us the strength to stand firm in our faith and trust in God, for as long as the situation lasts, because, as Paul says, *"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day"* (1 Timothy 1:12). So the blessing of knowing Scriptures and the power of God is that we know that *"God of all comfort ... comforts us in all tribulation"* so that instead of piercing ourselves with sorrow and giving up hope, *"we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God"* (2 Corinthians 1:4). So instead of questioning God in times of our tribulation, we declare together with Paul, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort"* (2 Corinthians 1:3). And so we walk in victory, not in defeat, because though *"we are hard*

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pressed on every side, yet (we) are not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8). So, in all situations we declare thanks to God through our blessed Saviour Christ Jesus, for He “always leads us in triumph in Christ...” (2 Corinthians 2:14).

That beloved, and much more, is the blessing of knowing Scriptures and the power of God!