

Mark 12:18-27

May 5, 2019

Tunnel Vision. Here is a semi-official definition,

“Tunnel vision occurs when your peripheral or ‘side’ vision, deteriorates, or is lost altogether. The result is that you may only be able to see things in a small circle directly in front of your eyes, as if you are looking directly through a tunnel.”

Though I have no experience with tunnel vision, that definition is exactly what I would expect.

What I didn’t expect came next,

“It may sound like an obvious symptom but many people don’t realize they have tunnel vision where the loss of peripheral vision happens over some time.”

Further—get this—a leading profession says, people who are afflicted and impaired by tunnel vision, “almost never” realize they have tunnel vision.

People who have tunnel vision don’t know they have tunnel vision. Yikes. How could it be that someone could effectively lose all their peripheral vision and be none the wiser?

It seems beyond comprehension to slowly experience the constriction of sight and not even know.

The answer?

Get regular eye tests from eye care professionals. You need someone who knows what they are doing to check your vision.

Tunnel vision is not just a malady of eyes—it can be a life malady too. Millions of people are stricken with what we might call spiritual tunnel vision. They think they can and discern spiritual matters but they have tunnel vision.

People who suffer from this variety of tunnel vision almost never realize they stricken by it.

If you trust what you see but can't see enough of what you need to see—what can you do? You are in serious trouble. You are going to need someone else to diagnose your tunnel vision because you won't see it for yourself.

So, today we are going to submit ourselves to a vision test. We are going to join Jesus again in our journeys with him through the book of Mark and submit to a spiritual vision test.

Here is the problem—If Jesus is not the dominant focus of your field of vision—you will get a bad case of tunnel vision.

You might have tunnel vision and not even know it. Almost no one does.

We will need help—we need someone to examine our sight and diagnose your vision. And so we come again to Jesus.

Today we are going to meet a delegation of men known as Sadducees—men afflicted with tunnel vision—as they meet Jesus. They had tunnel vision and they didn't even know it.

We are coming to Jesus again too. And as he examines these men, we are going to—if we listen—to be examined as well.

We all need to listen to Jesus so that we can see him appropriately. That is how this works.

What kind of tunnel vision might you have? How is your sight limited? Do you think you can take in vast spiritual landscapes but in reality you can only see a small pinprick?

We join Jesus in Jerusalem in the last week of his life as he stands in the temple area before a vast crowd. Everyone's eyes are fixed on him as the Jewish ruling elite come up to him to try and make him look a fool in front of others. (And you thought the Facebook phenomena was new). The Herodians and the Pharisees were came and were unceremonially expelled and sent away.

Now come the Sadducees. They are not asking for a vision test—but they will get one anyway.

In Mark 12:18 we take our place amongst the crowd and listen to this Jesus.

“And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question, saying, [19] “Teacher, 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. [20] There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. [21] And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. [22] And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. [23] In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.”

[24] Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? [25] For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. [26] And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? [27] He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.” Mark 12:18–27

PRAY

The Sadducees & Their question
The Savior & His response

1. Sadducees & Their Question (Mark 12:18-22)

First, the Sadducees—who were they? It sounds like a group of people perpetually sad and morose. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Sadducees were the educated and the wealthy of Jerusalem. These were the guys who had all the power. They were instagram famous, hounded by the paparazzi and featured on Jerusalem’s Lifestyles of the rich and famous.

They had money.
They had prestige.
They had power.

And now they had Jesus before them. Mark gives us an introduction that is typical for him in verse 18,

“And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection.”

Mark points out that bit about not believing in the resurrection means they thought after someone died they turned to dust and that was it. Mark points that out as a signal.

Jesus knows this.

Further, the Sadducees only accept the first 5 books the Old Testament. The reason they don't believe in the resurrection is because in their reading of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy they saw no evidence of a resurrection.

These guys didn't believe in the resurrection AND wanted to show Jesus to be a fraud by trapping him in a question that he could not possibly answer.

Last week the Pharisees and Herodians seasoned their assaults with flattery. The Sadducees don't. They are accustomed to looking down on others and get right to the point.

Vs. 19,

"Teacher, 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."

This whole question reads like a cryptic riddle or joke. It has the feel of a joke that starts off—Seven brothers, Moses and a woman go to a bar.

But what are they talking about with this marrying the brother stuff? In Deuteronomy 25 Moses taught what is called leverite marriage. If a husband died before he and his wife were able to conceive and have a child it was the duty of the dead man's brother to produce an heir with the widow.

That is strange. Why?

Two reasons.

The first is that there is no social security or welfare in this system. The means of providing for people came from their family. No child means no future.

Second, by producing an heir all of the dead brothers property stays in the family and is not spread out all over. There is no evidence that the nation ever obeyed this teaching in their history.

And so the Sadducees take that and make it ridiculous.

Verse 20,

“There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. 21 And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. 22 And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. 23 In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.”

Do you understand?

One woman marries one man. Before they have kids, he dies. She marries his brother. He dies. She marries the next brother. He dies. Seven times.

The logical question might be—How stupid can this family be, it is clear she is bent on killing a whole family.

Not really.

Do you see that the Sadducees are not really asking an honest question? They are trying to trap Jesus. Because they don't believe there is any life after death and Jesus does—they were trying to show him up in front of the crowd and make him look like a fool as they did it.

Spoiler. It is not going to work very well.

They think they are exposing a blind spot for Jesus but they are actually showing everyone that they have spiritual tunnel vision. Jesus is about to give his diagnosis in front of all those assembled.

They have tunnel vision and don't even know it.

We've heard Sadducees and their ridiculous question. Now we hear the diagnosis from Jesus.

2. The Savior and his Response (Mark 12:24-27)

Vs. 24,

“Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?”

Wow.

Guys, here is the reason you are wrong. You who teach Israel about God from the scriptures know neither the scriptures NOR the power of God. You don't understand what you are saying OR who God is.

That would be a bit like telling Warren Buffet that he does not know anything about finance or investment.

As scathing as it is unexpected.

They assumed that at the resurrection life would continue more or less unchanged as it is now. False.

Vs. 25,

“For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”

He doesn't spend time telling us what life after the resurrection will look like, but one thing is clear, life goes on but it will be very different. So different that if

he explained it to them they would not be able to understand at all. There are new categories of life that they and we cannot yet grasp.

You will notice if you read how life after death is described it is always in terms of what is not there.

No crying

No pain

No tears

Now we add another thing to the list—

No marriage.

As much as we would like a more detailed description of what life IS like after the resurrection, Jesus moves on to show them from the scriptures they purport to know how very wrong they are.

Vs. 26,

“And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?”

Jesus doesn't say Exodus 3 because the chapters were not numbered. Instead he says, you know the passage about the bush—to you remember what he said to Moses at that bush?

That is the story of the burning bush. Moses was out tending to sheep in the far reaches of the desert. Out there alone and then he sees a bush on fire. But the strange thing about it was that the bush was burning but not being consumed.

Moses sees this and decides to investigate.

"When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

It was holy because God was there. And then Moses is introduced to the voice coming from the bush.

6 And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. - Exodus 3:4-6

That passage is what Jesus is quoting when he says—

“And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?”

And he goes on in verse 27,

27 He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.”

Do you see his point?

At the bush God did not say I was the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He doesn't introduce himself to Moses and say essentially—when they were alive—I am the one who was their God.

No.

He uses the present tense. He says,

'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'

What is his point? While it is true that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were still alive centuries after their deaths with God—ALSO it points to the power of God.

God made an agreement (a covenant) with Abraham and all that would follow him. He pledged himself to Abraham and his people. This pledge is stronger than the bonds of death. This God does not pledge only for a lifetime, but for eternity.

When God makes an agreement—settles a promise—when he vows to be their God and they his possession—he does NOT say 'till death do us part.

Rather he says I am with you now and forever. I am with you forever not even allowing death to put a wedge between you and I.

Those things go hand in hand. When you misunderstand the scriptures you will not understand the power of God.

This God has power that overcomes the grave. And if you knew how to read the scriptures—you Sadducees—you would know this. But because you neither know the scriptures NOR the power of God you misunderstood the resurrection entirely.

The Sadducees had tunnel vision—they could not believe they were wrong and could not see either what the scriptures meant or grasp the power of God.

They were unable to take their eyes off their own opinions and see Jesus.

It is ironic that Jesus is talking to anyone about the resurrection. What no one in the temple that day understood was that without the resurrection all would be lost.

And even more, what no one could possibly grasp, the God that came to Moses in the burning bush and spoke, "I Am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." That same voice was speaking to the whole crowd.

And even more unexpectedly, the promise of God toward the people of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was so robust, so sure, so firm that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the living himself died.

Jesus Christ, according to the promise of the scriptures died and by the power of God rose again from the dead.

But the Sadducees could not see who was standing right before their very eyes. They had tunnel vision and could not/did not focus on Jesus Christ.

All of their efforts and exertions were in the service of proving themselves right and disproving this or that

from the scriptures. And they missed the Savior right before their eyes.

Think about how little hope there is if they were in fact right, that there was no resurrection. That would mean you die and that's it.

Where is the hope in that?

Jesus has a much better way. According to the scriptures and the power of God Jesus has opened a new way. He has defeated death and promises that any who trust in him and follow him will not experience eternal death.

Do you see him?

The Sadducees did not.

All their peripheral vision was gone and all they could do was focus on their own way too narrow opinions.

They could not see who was standing right in front of them. It is unfortunate when someone has tunnel vision, but tragic if someone has spiritual tunnel vision.

If your eyes are fixed on anything or anyone aside from Jesus Christ, you have tunnel vision. You might

think you can see, but if Jesus is not in your sights, you don't.

Here is the tragedy, people with spiritual tunnel vision don't recognize the signs. They have no idea they can't see what they need to see.

What are the symptoms of Spiritual Tunnel vision?

- *You don't see Jesus.*

You have eyes for success, achievements, prestige, fame, a steady job, friends, fun or whatever. You are so focused on what you have to do, who you have to be that you don't think you need Jesus. You say things like,

Or rather. I live for....

"I'll be okay when I get married."

"I'll be okay when I graduate."

"I'll be okay when I am proven right."

"I'll be okay when I see my kids successful."

"I'll be okay when I'm sober 6 months."

"I'll be okay when my kids have kids."

"I'll be okay when I have that job."

"I'll be okay when I lose that weight."

All of humanity was made to live for something and each of us can live for lesser things than Jesus. The problem is that if we live for anything less than Jesus we develop spiritual tunnel vision.

Here is how it works. Let's say you live to give your kids the advantages you never had. You strain to

- Give them opportunity
- Get them in the right school
- Get them the right training
- Get them in the right sports team
- So they can live the right life

Those are good things, but if they become your focus you will wrongly assume that you should live for your kids. That is spiritual tunnel vision.

Here's the problem—what you are asking your kids to do is give you fulfillment and give your life meaning.

That never works. Even if you have good kids they are not worth sacrificing all for.

When you set your sights on things that come and go—you are asking for tunnel vision.

What are you living for?

Only Jesus is worth following. Only Jesus cannot disappoint. Only Jesus died to purchase those with tunnel vision so focused on themselves to give them the cure of forgiveness.

This is where we need to understand BOTH the scriptures AND the power of God.

Part of the reason we joined Jesus here in Mark is so that you can see it is worthwhile to follow him.

If you are not, start today.

Another sign that you might have tunnel vision is if you.

- *Grew up in a religious tradition.*

That might sound strange. But these Sadducees were very traditional and religious and yet they were afflicted by tunnel vision. They said they followed God but when God became man and lived among them, they could not see him for who he was.

Jesus Christ came to save sinners. And sometimes the problem with religion is that it can inoculate us against the truth. We might think that because we went to church, got baptized, took communion,

prayed and read your Bible and you might think because I did all of that, I'm okay.

You might not be.

Even worse, there are some of you here who grew up going to a church from time to time and you think you have to clean yourself up to come to him.

Even if you grew up in a good tradition you might have the wrong idea about what it is to follow Jesus. You might think that you need to obey more or improve yourself more and then he will accept you.

False.

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners—not sinners who try and clean themselves up to be acceptable.

If you are not following him and feel like you are not worthy—you can today. The problem with the Sadducees is that they felt like Jesus was not worthy of them.

Those who know most about God are those who are often most blind toward God.

They had it exactly backward.

I hope you don't.

You can have tunnel vision by being fixated on how unworthy you are. Yes, you are a sinner but he is a greater savior than the measure of your sin.

Put him at the center of your vision.

Having tunnel vision is not just something for people who don't follow Jesus. It is also something we Christians can be stricken with as well.

How?

- *We focus on what we don't have.*

Even as Christians we can lose our focus on Christ. We can think that we deserve some better shake in life and not what we are going through now. Let's say you want something so bad that is that is all you think about and pray about and live for—things like,

- Getting healed
- Having Grandkids
- Getting out of debt

- Having a good reputation
- Being understood
- Didn't expect it to go like this

Do you see what you are doing? You are putting the focus of your life on something aside of Jesus. How dangerous that is!

Each week we come together to remind ourselves that in this world we will have trouble and yet—we can trust Jesus with everything.

Let us look to the scriptures and the power of God.

In Philippians we hear, "To live is Christ."

That means he is worth it. If we focus on what we don't have we have spiritual tunnel vision. Focus on Christ. Christ is better than the gifts he gives.

- He will not treat us as our sins deserve.
- He will forgive our every sin.
- He will hold us fast.
- He has conquered, so will we.

So ends our vision test. How did you score? All of us have some degree of tunnel vision.

Let's fix our gaze on Christ.

PRAY

[23] Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith,
from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Ephesians 6:23