

Small Group Guide

Based on "Curiosity Rising" -- Mark 12:18-27

OVERVIEW

This sermon explores Jesus' confrontation with the Sadducees over the resurrection, using their exchange to challenge believers to examine the motives they bring to worship, the way they handle Scripture, and the confidence they can have in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The message calls the church to pursue genuine, heart-level worship and to hold firmly to the hope of eternal life.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. We can approach God with pretense and presuppositions without realizing it, and this quietly poisons our worship, our relationships in the church, and our openness to what God is doing.
 2. Scripture must be handled carefully and honestly. Twisting or isolating verses to suit our preferences or agendas leads us away from truth rather than toward it.
 3. Jesus diagnoses the real problem -- not knowing Scripture and not knowing the power of God -- and calls us to address both deficiencies seriously.
 4. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a secondary doctrine. It is the anchor of the entire Christian faith. Without it, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15, our faith is empty.
 5. God is not the God of the dead but of the living. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work among his people today.
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening Question -- Getting the Conversation Started

- Think about a time when you came to church, a Bible study, or a conversation about faith with your mind already made up about something. What was that like, and how did it affect your experience?
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Section 1 -- Pretense and Presupposition

Pastor Virgil observed that the Sadducees came to Jesus not to find truth but to trap him, and he challenged the group to consider how believers can carry similar hidden motives into worship.

- In what ways do personal preferences -- music style, teaching format, church traditions -- sometimes become barriers to genuine worship rather than bridges toward it?
- Pastor Virgil said, "When we come to God's house with pretense, God says they are not ready for the rain." What do you think it looks like practically to come to worship without pretense? What would need to change in your own preparation before a Sunday morning?
- Have you ever noticed bitterness or a critical spirit creeping into your worship experience? How did you recognize it, and what did you do about it?

Section 2 -- Pliable Positioning and Handling Scripture

The Sadducees used a passage from Deuteronomy to construct a scenario designed to make the resurrection look absurd. Pastor Virgil warned against using Scripture selectively to support what we already want to believe.

- Can you think of examples -- from culture, from conversations you have had, or even from your own life -- where a Bible verse was used out of context to justify something? What was the effect of that?
- Pastor Virgil referenced 2 Timothy 2:15, which urges believers to study and handle the Word of God accurately. What habits or practices help you engage with Scripture honestly rather than just looking for verses that confirm what you already think?
- Why do you think it can be tempting, even for sincere Christians, to interpret the Bible in ways that conveniently fit their preferences or circumstances?

Section 3 -- The Problem Pronounced

Jesus told the Sadducees they were wrong for two reasons: they did not know the Scriptures, and they did not know the power of God.

- Which of these two deficiencies do you think is more common in the church today -- not knowing Scripture, or not believing in the power of God? Why?

- Pastor Virgil shared that Genesis 1:1 is the foundation. If you believe God created everything out of nothing, everything else follows. How does anchoring yourself in the character and power of God change the way you approach difficult questions about faith?
 - Where in your own life have you seen God's power at work in a way that strengthened your trust in him? How do you keep that memory alive when doubt creeps in?
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Section 4 -- The Proclamation of God

Jesus pointed the Sadducees back to Exodus, where God identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob -- not "was," but "is." He is the God of the living.

- What does it mean to you personally that God identifies himself as "I am" rather than "I was"? How does that affect the way you pray or seek him?
 - Revelation 20 describes a final resurrection and judgment. Pastor Virgil said the church holds the key to life and death for others as God's messengers. How does that responsibility shape the way you think about the people in your life who do not yet know Christ?
 - Pastor Virgil said, "He didn't die just for you. He died so that you could tell someone else about him." Who in your life needs to hear the message of the resurrection? What is one step you could take this week toward that conversation?
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Section 5 -- Confidence in the Resurrection

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15 is that without the resurrection, the entire Christian faith collapses. But because Christ has risen, believers have unshakeable hope.

- How does the resurrection of Jesus practically affect the way you live day to day? Is it something you think about often, or does it tend to stay in the background?
 - Pastor Virgil reminded the group that God does not expect perfection -- that is why he sent Jesus. Is there an area of your life where you have been struggling to accept grace and rest in what Christ has already done? How can this group support you in that?
 - What would change in your church community if every member came to worship each week genuinely expecting to encounter the living God?
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PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your group meets again.

1. **Heart Check Before Worship.** Before next Sunday, spend five to ten minutes in quiet prayer asking God to reveal any pretense, bitterness, or distraction you are carrying into worship. Write down what surfaces and bring it to him honestly.
2. **Scripture Discipline.** Pick one passage mentioned in this sermon -- Mark 12:18-27, 1 Corinthians 15:15-20, or Deuteronomy 25:5-10 -- and read it in its full context. Note what you observe when you read the surrounding verses alongside the passage itself.
3. **Power Journal.** For the next seven days, write down one instance each day where you notice God at work around you. At the end of the week, review what you recorded and reflect on what it reveals about his ongoing activity in your life.
4. **Resurrection Conversation.** Identify one person in your life who is skeptical about the resurrection or about faith in general. Pray for them daily this week and ask God to open a natural door for a genuine conversation.
5. **Examine Your Motives.** Reflect honestly on one area of church life -- a ministry, a class, a relationship -- where you may have been approaching things with a hidden agenda or personal preference rather than a servant's heart. Bring that to God and ask him to reorient your motives.

CLOSING PRAYER GUIDE

Close your group time by praying together over these three areas.

- **Worship** -- Ask God to soften hearts and remove pretense so that every member of your group can encounter his presence without reservation.
- **Truth** -- Ask for a hunger to know Scripture deeply and handle it honestly, and for wisdom to recognize when it is being distorted.
- **Hope** -- Thank God for the resurrection of Jesus Christ and ask him to make that hope feel alive and real in the daily lives of everyone in the group.