

Marriage on the Edge of Eternity

Series: Encountering Jesus (through the Gospel of Luke)
February 9, 2020 – Brad Bailey

Luke 20:27-40

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Intro:

When you know the end it puts the present in perspective.

I was thinking about this in relationship to the **Super Bowl** last Sunday.

Football is my favorite sport... great game... but like any game it came to an end. **As they brought out the legends....and we could see these lives across the longer stages of life... it made me think about the longevity of their lives... their time with these teammates playing football is usually just 10 or 15 years... they only play for so many years...then their relationship continues in something larger than football.**

> Keep that in mind....as we listen to Jesus.

Luke 20:27-40

Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. ²⁸ "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. ³⁰ The second ³¹ and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. ³² Finally, the woman died too. ³³ Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" ³⁴ Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵ But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶ and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. ³⁷ But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' ³⁸ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive." ³⁹ Some of the teachers of the law responded, "Well said, teacher!" ⁴⁰ And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Wow... (I love that last line... I can picture it.... they dare to ask a question because they thought they were so smart...only to realize they should stop.)

In the midst of this exchange...Jesus says something about marriage ...that may be surprising...

Any of those married who go pick out a Valentines card this week... probably won't find it used in those cards.

As we engage this exchange a little more what we will hear is that Jesus is **actually speaking to something much more fundamental**....and I believe he has good news for life itself... and what is actually a helpful understanding for marriage.

[Context]

It is now the **final week of Christ's earthly life and ministry**... two or three days before Jesus was crucified. Jesus has come to Jerusalem for the final time. Pilgrims crowd the city in anticipation of Passover. **Because of his rising popularity with the people**, the Jewish leaders have already decided to find a way to put Jesus to death. Knowing that his time is short, **Jesus allows the leaders to confront him**... and they have come with questions to entrap him and turn the people away.... But he is piercing their vanity.

Mostly he deals with the Pharisees who were the **largest religious group** in Judea. But on this occasion ... **it is the Sadducees**. They were the **aristocratic group**. In essence, they were those who just used religion to hold political prominence.

Luke helps us to understand who the Sadducees were by saying, they are those "who deny that there is a resurrection." Furthermore Acts 23:8, states that the Sadducees did not believe in angels or spirits either. They were they were those who had become secular.... who **looked down on those they deemed less sophisticated**. And this is what they thought they could do with Jesus.

[The nature of their question]

They believed that only the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) were binding on the Jewish people. At the heart of the trick question was **the custom of "levirate marriage."**

In the book of Deuteronomy, a provision is made for the perpetuation of the family. [1]

When a husband dies without having born a son... his family line would be lost and his wife would not be cared for. (You may recall that daughters would join their husband's family when they were married.)

SO in such cases... **the man's brother must marry the woman**. If a son is born he is to **carry on the family line** of the deceased brother ... so, as the law puts it, ... **the deceased man's ... "name may not be blotted out ... of Israel"** (Deuteronomy 25:6). He would also provide care for the his widowed mother.

So they essentially **create an extreme scenario to mock the idea** of a future life. It **involved seven weddings ... and a funeral**. They **tried to show the absurdity** of the whole concept of the Resurrection by setting out the story of a woman who had seven husbands.

"There was a family in which there were seven brothers. All married the same woman and not one of them produced a child. Finally, the woman also died. "In the resurrection," they want to know, "whose wife will the woman be? For (all) the seven (brothers) had married her." (Luke 20:27-38)

The point is, you can't say for sure whose wife she will be. The Sadducees used questions like this to show what they considered to be **the absurdity** of believing in life after death.

They did their best to get Jesus to understand that such an afterlife existence was a mere fallacy.

They wanted to show Jesus why they were so smart... and sophisticated. Maybe he could come around and join their ideas.

(Sound familiar? A lot of people like Jesus but want him to fit in their ideas about life... because... they are proud of their ideas about life.)

Like most people today... more connected to this life than what is to come.

What Jesus is responding to **may be a silly question...**but it **opens up something** that is **quite serious.**

In Mark's accounting of this exchange... he says

"... you have made a serious error." - Mark 12:27

He doesn't just say... it's really a secondary issue that doesn't matter.. just go live well. Rather he says... **you have a significant problem...**you are choosing this world and denying God.

And in Matthews account he describes why... in saying...

"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" - Matthew 22:29

"You do not know the Scriptures."

There are several Old Testament texts ... that Jesus could have cited ... which speak to the resurrection.

The prophet Isaiah said,

"Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise...." - Isaiah 26:19

The prophet Daniel confirmed

"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt." - Danial 12:2

But since the Sadducees only accepted as binding the first five books of the Old Testament Jesus refers to Exodus 3:6.... Where God speaks to Moses declaring...

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." - Exodus 3:6

God identifies himself this way: **“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob”** (Exodus 3:6). Jesus is arguing from the **tense of the verse**.

Not, “I was the God of your father,”

But, “I am the God of your father.”

If God “was” the father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it means they died and are no more. But that’s not what God said. He said, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” meaning, “They are still alive!”

They had imposed their own limited ideas on what God was actually revealing... that was there in the Scriptures. And he said...

“You do not know the power of God.”

By asking this trick question, the Sadducees showed that they underestimated God’s power.

They started with life as we know it now and **simply extrapolated into the future**. But Jesus says that the resurrection is not a continuation of this life but a transformation of all that we have known. Note these two key phrases:

“This age” (v. 34).

“That age” (v. 35).

We need to realize how different the age to come is. Life as we know it and life after death are not alike.

Even in this brief response he notes three crucial differences.

First, there is no marriage in “that age.” The point was that life in the eternal state is more than just an extension of what we have here. The Jews of Jesus days thought that the kingdom of heaven was only an extension of the good things in this life. He did not say that we would not know our present wife or husband in the age to come, but rather that the relationship would be different.

But the issue of marriage is just a window into the greater change that will come...

Secondly, there is no death in “that age.” Jesus identifies the quality of life when He says “neither can they die anymore,” it is eternal life. Notice that Jesus does not say, “they will not die” He says, “they cannot die.”

Third, they shall be like angels.

It’s important to understand that Jesus does not state that angelic life and human life are the same.

It's become common in western literature to portray that when humans die they become angels (... like Clarence in the old movie classic "It's A Wonderful Life" ... "trying to earn their wings.")

But the Scriptures were very clear: The angelic realm was created by God very distinct from this created order and the human realm.

And here very clearly Jesus speaks NOT of us becoming angels...but of us becoming LIKE angels...and he makes clear how we will be like them...we will not die. **We will no longer exist with the nature of a world that is devolving and dying.**

I want to take the final time to let this speak to us.

What he says about **marriage may be the secondary point**...but it is **significant**...so I want to help us hear **what he says to those married**...to those who are **not married**...and then **those of us who may want to know what the future of life holds.**

Amidst the larger point, Jesus says:

"The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵ But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage

I imagine some of you...like me...find this hard to hear.

It seems to denounce the very intimacy that I value so much.

And I can imagine that if you're under 40...you might think... "no sex" doesn't sound good...and if over 50..."yea that...but the also the thought of missing the nature of a shared companionship. The loss of a shared life doesn't sound good."

And if not married...you may be thinking.... "Well at least finally everyone will be in the same boat"...or ... "Wow...I will be stuck in this state forever."

So let's consider first...

How this speaks to those who are married...or may enter a marriage relationship one day...

It **may sound** like Jesus is **denouncing marriage.**

Far from it. Jesus embraced marriage as a sacred part of creation.... A gift to be honored.

Through marriage... we become those who **share in covenant. The nature of marriage is that of entering a covenant... not a contract based on merits..but a covenant in which one chooses to unite themselves to another... a reflection of what God extends to us. Jesus understands that as covenant partners – marriage is "a signpost of God's nature" in this temporal world. But it is a temporal world...and one day that covenant will be fully fulfilled and the signpost will come to an end.**

And Jesus knows that God designed that marriage relationship with the sacred potential to create life... **we become co-creators. But in the age to come...this too will come to an end.**

What Jesus brings forth...is that: Marriage is a means ...not an end.

We need to keep the ends in mind... in fact...at the forefront of how we live.

This is what the apostle Paul calls us into as well.

In the Book of Ephesians, he says... marriage is a reflection of Christ's love for the church. He says... "Husbands, love your wives... as Christ loves the church..."

But in would 1 Corinthians 7 Paul speaks of how marriage has the potential of distracting us from this undistracted devotion to the Lord. He tells the married couples, "Hey, those who are married, live as though you are not" (see [1 Corinthians 7:29](#)).

Marriage is a means that can serve God... but it is not the ends that we are making it. There is something bigger than you just enjoying each other. The time is short, and that is why he says: "Those who are married, live as though you are not." There is something bigger than the two of you.

He places marriage in the light of eternity... that which we are living on the edge of. His point is not about marriage... it's about eternity.

"Marriage is great, but it's not forever. It's until death do us part. Then come eternal rewards or regrets depending on how we spent our lives." – Francis Chan

Our bodies and affections have become more attached to what is temporary. So we think of heaven as simply an extension of all that is good here... those we love... what we enjoy.

I can't imagine not being bound to my wife... my children in the same way I am now. But that may be the point.

We are **small minded.**

Jesus doesn't suggest that we won't remain intimate... or bound by the earthly lives we shared... it will just be different... the fulfillment of what we enjoy but never fully satisfy in this age.

For those who hesitate at this remark because their marriage has been so good ... just remember... heaven will be even better.

We need to expand our realization for the changes between this age and the age to come. **Marriage will not be the only human institution** that we find on earth will also not be in heaven. There will be **no social classes, no slavery... no inequality between genders.** Women will be equal to men. Slaves will be equal to their former owners. Poor will be equal to rich.

The only standing in Heaven will be that of everyone standing before the source of all love. **Everyone will be one with the Father and with one another.**

How this speaks to those who are not married...

Some may worry that they will never experience life's greatest gift.

With these wordsJesus just redefined your very position in the whole of life.

And this is not just a one off... it is rooted in the way life really is.

Marriage is not the end.

Jesus was not married...and he was more complete than any human life has ever been.

So if you are stuck think that the experience of marriage or any relationship on earth is the best... stop and realize that this is only a shadow of what is to come.

If you are stuck thinking that living with forever without sex sounds like a loss.... Remember who created the power of sex... as just a shadow of what is to come.

We will have intimacy... but more powerfully and peacefully than we can even imagine.

And finally... I want us to hear...

How this speaks to those who are alive in these bodies.

In truth... I believe that if we stop and consider who we really are... it is a matter of being alive in these bodies...but also that we are a being not just a body. And this is what Jesus is calling us to take hold of.

- **We will bear our distinct personhood...but as our truest and most satisfied selves.**

Note that the text that Jesus raises with the Sadducees repeats three times that God is the “God of” each of three individuals. It means that even after death, the Lord knew them and loved individually. Abraham was still Abraham, Isaac was still Isaac, and Jacob was still Jacob.

That means that **your individuality will be preserved in eternity.** You will recognize your loved ones and they will recognize you. We will be **our distinct, enhanced, truest selves...** in ways that we can’t even imagine.

- **We will have bodies but not corrupted with aging, sickness, and death.**

As far as our bodies go, our bodies to use the words of Paul, **“will be raised imperishable”** (1 Cor. 15:42). It says they will be resurrected in glorified form. Life free of all the indignities of this age.

Death is not the completion of life but the completion INTO life.

This is what Christ defined.

The **human drama is taken up in him.** When Jesus was raised... two qualities are made clear... he had a body that could touch and be touched...that could eat...but also that was different...could enter through closed doors.

What we will be has not yet been made known...it is beyond us. It is far **more radical...** which means more at the core... **more fundamental.**

We worry sometimes that when we become limited in some way...that we are not fully ourselves. The **truth is that we have never been fully ourselves.**

If we think that the **pre-born life** makes a **big transition** when it is born into what seems a whole new world...it can **barely suggest what a new world we will enter outside this world.** How much does that unborn child understand of life outside the womb? Not much... just the distant sound of voices and the sensation of limited movement.

Then the day comes when they enter the new world they were created for... it is so vast... but there awaits them... a voice—a tender, melodious voice they had only heard echoes of. **It's a presence** that has **waited for them...that welcomes them...the one whose image they bear...it's their source of life...the source of their comfort...and their completion.**

[In this life we are like that unborn child. We know as much of life after death as the unborn child knows of life after birth. We hear the sound of laughter coming from the other side and stories of a great city unlike any city we've ever known. It seems so fantastic as to be almost a fairy tale. We may comfort ourselves that we know so much about heaven, but in reality we know so little that we hardly know anything at all.]

Closing:

This is the life that Christ came to make possible for all who will turn to him. It is why he calls us to receive him as our savior. He says this life is for.... **“Those who are considered or accounted worthy to attain that age.” Who is worthy of heaven? There's only one human being, only one human being who was ever worthy of heaven — the Lord Jesus Christ.** He says, “If you're going to enjoy this resurrection you've got to be counted righteous. Since you're not righteous yourself, you will need another righteousness in order to be counted righteous.”

So let's close with an opportunity to receive him.... and then to re-center ourselves in the age to come.

Prayer

1. To accept his life.
2. Invite each of us to close our eyes and forget about everything that is temporary. Then talk to God only about those things that are unseen and eternal.

Resources: John Hamby (“One More Question”); Kerry Haynes (Relationships in the Hereafter); [Article: Marriage on the Edge of Eternity By Francis Chan -November 4, 2014](#)
[Book: You and Me Forever: Marriage in Light of Eternity \(2014\)](#)

Notes:

1. Deuteronomy 25:5 –
“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.

The reason for a Levirate marriage was for procreation. So that the dead brother who had no heir could have an heir.

By New Testament times, the Levirate marriage seems to have fallen into disuse and so it was an academic question – a bit along the lines of “how many angels can dance on the head of a needle”