

This morning, we are in the 27th week of a sermon series that I have entitled “Meeting Jesus.” I have been making my way this year through Luke’s account of the life of Jesus, looking at various interactions that people had with Jesus, in order to better understand what it means to know and follow Him. This morning, I will looking at Luke 20:27-39, looking at an interaction between Jesus and a group of religious elites known as the Sadducees.

Luke 20:27–39 - 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 raise up offspring 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 the age to come 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 burning 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!”

If you’re unfamiliar with the Sadducees, they were a wealthy religious class that made up much of the priestly class in Israel. They only accepted the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, as authoritative, not heeding the traditions of past Jewish teachers the way the Pharisees did. They also did not believe in angels or in the resurrection. This interaction that we read today is part of a series of challenges presented to Jesus after he has entered the temple on Palm Sunday. The teachers of the law question by what authority he is teaching. A group asks him whether it is right to pay taxes to Caesar or not. And now the Sadducees ask Jesus a theological question that they believe will expose how ridiculous the concept of the resurrection is. I want to use my sermon today to briefly address how Jesus handles their challenge to shed light on the truth and importance of the resurrection, and then to spend more time looking specifically at what Jesus’ words have to teach us about marriage and romantic love.

The Sadducees pose a hypothetical question to Jesus based on the concept of levirate marriage. In those days, the expectation was that if a husband died without

children, then the husband's brother would marry the widow and procreate with her in order to continue the husband's lineage.

Deuteronomy 25:5–6 - If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. ⁶ The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

Based off of this custom, the Sadducees pose a scenario in which a woman who had seven husbands dies without having children. The question is: **“Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”**

Great question. If you've been married more than once, maybe you've wondered the same question – is it just going to be awkward for all eternity?

In Matthew's version of this interaction, Jesus begins his response with these words: **Matthew 22:29** - Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.” He continues to tell them that they do not understand that life in the resurrection is not the same as life in this age, that there is no marriage and no death, because we will be immortal, like the angels. And he goes on to tell them that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, that the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is still in effect because they live with God beyond the grave and will eventually see the promises made to them fulfilled. Notice that Jesus appeals to a text from the Torah in order to make his case instead of appealing to later passages like Daniel 12:2 to support the reality of the resurrection.

Daniel 12:2 - Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

Eventually, of course, proof for the reality of the resurrection will come from Jesus himself, who, after three days in the grave, will be raised from the dead, conquering sin and death. Remember that in John's gospel, in the Bible, Jesus was confronted with the death of his friend Lazarus. In her despair, Lazarus's sister Martha came to Jesus and said “Lord... if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” ²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” ²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they

die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”
(**John 11:21-26**).

And as the writer of Hebrews puts it:

Hebrews 2:14–15 - Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

The Bible teaches us that after death comes judgment.

Hebrews 9:27 - Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to **face judgment**,

Some will have eternal life. Some will be separated eternally from God.

John 3:16–18 - For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

And in the end, heaven and earth will be one, and the dwelling of God will be with us on this renewed heaven and earth.

Revelation 21:1–5 - Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and **be their God**. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

We will live not as disembodied spirits but in resurrection bodies:

1 Corinthians 15:42–44 - So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

As the 20th century Dutch theologian and minister Anthony Hoekema put it: “The new Jerusalem does not remain in a heaven far off in space, but it comes down to the renewed earth; there the redeemed will spend eternity in resurrection bodies. So heaven and earth, now separated, will then be merged: the new earth will also be heaven, since God will dwell there with his people. Glorified believers in other words, will continue to be in heaven while they are inhabiting the new earth.”

Do you know Jesus? Are you right with God? Have you turned from sin to trust in Jesus as your Savior?

As Jesus points out to the Sadducees, the resurrected life will not be like life in this age, for there will be no more sin, no more decay, and no more death and we will see God face to face and be with Him forever. And in his response to the Sadducees’ question, he points out specifically some of the ways that marriage and romantic love will be different in eternity. And this has a lot of important implications for how we live today.

Jesus declares that the Sadducees are in error because they do not realize that there is no marriage in heaven. And the reason that there is no marriage in heaven is because marriage is meant to be a temporary sign pointing to the true love that we need, the love of God, and when we finally have that love to the fullest, then we no longer need the sign.

1) Marriage is a temporary sign pointing to the love we will enjoy forever with God

I believe this means that if you are married, you and your wife will no longer be husband and wife in heaven; the long-lost reunion with your departed spouse that is so popular in culture may not be exactly as you envision in your head when you arrive in heaven. Not that you won’t be reunited, but Jesus is saying that the joy of marital oneness that you experience on earth will be nothing compared to what you will be experiencing in eternity, in the presence of God. That’s worth considering for a second. **As great as marriage, companionship, sex, and raising children can be on earth, Jesus says that you won’t even be thinking about those things once**

you are in the presence of God, because there's something there that will be so much greater than even the best married life here on earth.

CS Lewis put it this way, when asked about sex in heaven: "I think our present outlook might be like that of a small boy who, on being told that the sexual act was the highest bodily pleasure should immediately ask whether you ate chocolates at the same time. On receiving the answer, "No," he might regard absence of chocolates as the chief characteristic of sexuality. In vain would you tell him that the reason why lovers in their carnal raptures don't bother about chocolates is that they have something better to think of. The boy knows chocolate; he does not know the positive thing that excludes it. We are in the same position. We know the sexual life; we do not know, except in glimpses, the other thing which, in Heaven, will leave no room for it."

This is why Jesus tells the Sadducees that they do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. They do not realize how the love we will share with God will eclipse even the best earthly love. In fact, our relationship with God in heaven is described using the imagery of a wedding:

Revelation 21:2–5 - I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things **has passed away**." ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Revelation 21:9–10 - One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

The people of God are described collectively (not individually) as the bride of Christ, and on the last day, as we come into eternity, it is described as a wedding with a wedding feast.

And in Paul's passage about marriage, he describes it this way:

Ephesians 5:21–33 - Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with **water through the word**, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will **become one flesh**.” ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Notice that in this passage, Paul tells us that the purpose of marriage is to be a sign pointing to the love between Jesus and the church. It isn't primarily happiness, or providing a home for children, but to point to Jesus. As the husband gives himself up for his wife, and the wife submits herself to the husband, we are meant to see a display of the love between Jesus and His people. This earthly marriage is meant to be a sign pointing to the relationship we were created to have with God. We are meant to enjoy a covenant relationship with God, a whole life commitment that is marked by intimacy, exclusivity, complementarity, and passionate love. And notice as well that the goal is not worldly happiness, but holiness, Christlikeness.

2) If you are single, consider remaining single so you can serve the Lord wholeheartedly

The primary love we were created to enjoy is the love of God. This is why the Bible is so high on singleness, because it is a recognition that when we are married, our interests are divided:

1 Corinthians 7:32–35 - I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. ³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—³⁴ and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she

can please her husband. ³⁵ I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

Paul elevates singleness, calling it a gift from God, just as much as marriage is a gift. **It's hard to appreciate just how radical this was in his day.** In those days, you had to be married and have children or you had no future, significance, or security. In fact, Caesar Augustus had widows fined if they failed to get married within 2 years, to ensure that they would not be a burden to the Roman government. As far as we can tell, Paul was the first to say it is good to be single. Christian widows did not have to get remarried, as they were cared for by their spiritual family, the church. Single men and women could serve God wholeheartedly while being a part of the Christian community, finding their significance in Christ and not in a relationship.

Matthew 12:48–50 – [Jesus] replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

The world tells us that romantic love is the highest love there is. Consider what Justice Kennedy wrote in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court decision that legalized gay marriage: “No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family.” That is the world’s view. But we know that there is a union more profound than marriage, that embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family, and that is our union with the Lord. Even the best marriage is but a shadow of that good reality.

Saying yes to Jesus as an unmarried person means saying no to sexual freedom, but it does not mean missing out on intimacy. Dennis Hollinger – “Life without sexual intimacy and marriage is not a deficient life. Rather, life without intimacy with God in Christ is deficient.” Our longings for a spouse or for sexual union are ultimately for the intimacy that is found in the One who created us.

- 3) **Our spouse is not our Savior or our judge, nor do we have to be our spouse's Savior**

We can allow each other to be human. Someone once asked me if my wife was jealous of my love for Jesus, because she was not my top priority. One of the

greatest gifts you can give your partner is to put Christ first. Let Him be the Savior. Put the burden on Him of being your perfect love. And let your partner be human.

Romans 5:6–8 - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- 4) Jesus is the only perfect love, so resist the temptation to look for it in any human

The grass is not always greener, and marriage is not the ultimate love. We can stay committed, knowing that Jesus is the only one who truly fulfills us. And if we feel stuck in a loveless marriage, we can still have in Jesus the greatest love of all.

If you only live once, then what is to stop you from trying to find someone better? But if you will live forever, then you know that you will have the love your heart is longing for forever. And so, while you are here on earth, you can love the imperfect person you are with to the glory of God.

Let me close with these words from Jonathan Edwards:

“God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.”