

Part 72: Love, Life and the Eternal Lord

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October 22, 2023

*"Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe :
All mimsy were the borogroves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.*

*'Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"*

For those who know Lewis Carroll's poem *Jabberwocky*, I'm sure you know it because it is famously a poem about nonsense—made up words about a made up place with a meaning that doesn't make sense.

I don't claim to know where each of you are in terms of your understanding of scripture, your conversion to Christianity, or your walk with Jesus. But I don't think it takes a prophet to say that when our passage today was read, many of you might as well have been reading *Jabberwocky*: there's a crazy mind teaser, a statement about there being no marriage in heaven, dead people rising, and a king who's not a Lord, but a son that's Lord over a king.

In Luke's narrative, Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem just a few days before he is to be crucified. But before the challenge of the cross he a series of three challenges from the religious official. Today is Jesus' response to the third and final challenge and at this point we might think his mind is a little exhausted.

Jesus isn't merely affirming some spiritual life that is eternal—he's affirming that dead people will one day rise with physical bodies. He's not saying that death will be one day done with, but that death will one day be undone. While making that bold statement he also undoes one of humanity's greatest idols: sex, marriage and intimacy. Not only does Jesus affirm a physical and eternal life, but he says that in that state there will be no marriage and marital intimacy.

I remember talking to a dear elderly widow in our church who told me that when her husband passed away the pastor said that they wouldn't be married in heaven. And while I questioned the bedside manner of that pastor, she was shocked to find out that he wasn't wrong. Christian or not, this idea sounds like nonsense despite the fact that for centuries our wedding vows include the phrase, "Till death do us part."

Our main point today is this: **Eternal life is present challenge but a forever joy.** While the doctrine eternity challenges our immediacy, by the end of this passage we see that the joys of glory make the greatest joys of this world seem like jabberwocky. Jesus is going to help us make that transition by adjusting our vision in three ways: first he moves our relational hope **From Spouses to Siblings**, then he shows the God who moves us **From Death to Life** and finally he shows that all of this is possible only when the Christ goes **From Human Son to Eternal Savior**.

We meet some new challengers today: the Sadducees. Luke assumes we don't need to know much about them but that they were a Jewish religious group who unlike the Pharisees didn't believe the Old Testament said anything about life after death or much less a physical resurrection.

To be honest, most Christians today live like Sadducees. We often ignore or don't think of eternity because we can't fathom how there could be more joy than what we have right now. For the Sadducees the challenge they brought to Jesus was how eternal life could make sense of our longing for marital intimacy. Can it get better than we have it right now?

The issue they bring up is called levirate marriage. In the Ancient Near East it was a big deal if a husband died with no male offspring. For one, the land rights and promise to that family would die off decreasing the potential size of a nation. But second, the remaining widow would be in a very vulnerable place physically and economically.

In Deuteronomy 25, God prescribed levirate marriage as a solution to this. If the deceased brother had another brother who was near and unmarried, he would take the woman as his wife. This would care for the wife in providing safety and security but it would also preserve the heritage of the deceased husband and therefore the wellbeing of the nation. While any future children this new couple bore would be named after the new husband, the first son born by the widow and her new husband would carry the name of the deceased husband. This is what we see in the book of Ruth where Boaz, acting as a type of Christ, redeems Ruth out of sacrificial love.

To our modern minds this might seem regressive and oppressive. But it was so incredibly caring and empowering at the time that if the qualifying brother-in-law refused to fulfill his obligation the widow would take him before the elders of the town, and in a public act of shaming she would take off his sandal, slap him across his face and spit on him. If the brother refused to care for his deceased brother and his widow his last name would become at that point: "Him who had his sandal pulled off."

While the practice of this was normal, the hypothetical situation these men bring is not. The Sadducee's come to Jesus: **Luke 20:28-29, 33**, "they asked him a question saying, 'Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children.' They go on to say this happened with the subsequent five brothers and then the woman herself and they conclude in verse 33 with the challenge, 'In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For seven had her as a wife.'"

The basic premise of the Sadducee's mind teaser is that the resurrection of the dead cannot account for the joys or problems of humanity. But Jesus' answer shows that they misunderstand marriage and they misunderstand the resurrection. Where their hope was in the hypothetical spouse, Jesus places their hope in being sons of the resurrection. This is our first point today where Jesus moves us **From Spouses to Siblings**.

Jesus doesn't try to untangle the issues of levirate marriage because Jesus speaks to the transformation or marriage itself. In the new heavens and in the new earth—marriage itself is dissolved in a sort of divine mystery. Look at what Jesus says, **Luke 20:34-36**, "And Jesus said to them, 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the

resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection."

So the first thing we notice is that Jesus speaks of marriage as being something caught between two ages. There is this age, and the next age. In other words Jesus gives marriage an expiration date. Thought it's not as if it sours and becomes distasteful—marriage was given to us by God. But instead marriage is like a bud that gives way to a flower, or scaffolding which one day is removed when the building is finished.

God has so designed marriage to have a similar use—for a time it has a dynamic, significant and exclusive role, but one day it becomes absorbed into the larger building.

Genesis (1:27) makes it clear "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

In other words, marriage is not essential to image bearing, it's not the center of any of our identities—but God specifically designed us male and female with all the potential plumbing we need to be together as male and female in marriage. In God's mercy, this was primarily for fruitfulness: "Be fruitful and multiply"—but also for relational joy, "It was not good that man was alone."

Therefore, God says in **Genesis 2:24**, "a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh." What was explicitly commanded to Adam and Eve in the garden is broadly accepted as the norm for the rest of humanity. What was patterned in Genesis was that marriage was between a man and a woman, for the sake of relational intimacy and procreation, it was the public formation of new family (leaving father and mother), and it was sealed and symbolized by the one flesh union in sex.

Now the problem is that sin ruined a lot of this. The first thing Adam did after they sinned was throw his wife under the bus and sin has forever complicated not only humanity, but gender roles, marriage and families. Complementary gender roles are places of contest. Marriage is often worshipped as God. Sex is detached from relational commitment and unity. And child bearing always includes physical pain and often the deeper wounds of miscarriages and barrenness. But despite this marriage is still a noble, worthwhile and God ordained grace.

But what seemed to be exclusive to marriage in the Old Testament, Jesus made plural in regards to the church in the New Testament. That is to say to my single brothers and sisters in here that while you might not have the experience of human marriage, you do not miss out on the essential joys and privileges of marriages.

The Lord has called married couples to be fruitful and multiply, but he has also called the church to do the very same thing. While most marriages produce babies, the church always produces disciples. Jesus says in **Matthew 28:19-20a**, "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Our purpose is not wrapped up in marriage, but neither is our pleasure. There are two places in scripture where the Bible speaks of the intimacy of two becoming one. The first is what we saw in the first marriage in the Garden of Eden, "two become one flesh," but the second is in the participation believers have with one another through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul speaks of this radical and real sense of intimacy we share when we take the Lord's Supper: **1 Corinthians 10:17**, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

So marriage sets an exclusive and physical pattern for God's plan, and the church sets a plural and spiritual pattern for God's plan. That's why Jesus is able to give an expiration date for marriage. Notice how he presented this. Look back at verse 35 and notice why he says they are no longer given in marriage: "Because they cannot die anymore."

What does he mean by that? Disciple making and baby making cease in the age to come. Why? We no longer need the physical means of creating God's people, and we no longer need the spiritual means of converting God's people. God's got all his people! Augustine puts it this way, **"For there shall be no generation in that place to which regeneration shall have brought us."**

When I get to heaven I will know Sarah, I will love Sarah, I will have strong affections for her, and I imagine I will still know Sarah in a unique way because I was her husband. But there will be one primary distinction Jesus points out here: I will not know her in an exclusive or a possessive way. That's the nature of the Sadducee's question: "Whose wife will she be?"

Because sex and marriage went together on earth, marriage by necessity and design was exclusive and possessive. Sarah was my wife, and I was not your husband. But when the need for exclusive procreation was dissolved—the need for possessive love in marriage was also dissolved. We will love one another perfectly and communally and without sex.

Jabberwocky says the world. We can't fathom a world where there is love, but no sex. That's why most cults devolve into some humanity distorting sexual plurality. But God's design is that there's something better than sexual, possessive love among two humans.

God gave C.S. Lewis a beautiful mastery of descriptive language, but he also gave him a keen desire to think about heaven. Regarding a sexless heaven he gave an illustration: Imagine you told a small boy that the sexual act was the highest bodily pleasure, only to have him ask if you got to each chocolate at the same time. Why does he ask that? Because to him if anything were to be of highest bodily pleasure it would be eating chocolate. He couldn't imagine that something in which you are denied chocolate could ever be pleasurable.

Lewis goes on to say, **"In vain you would 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. Hence where fullness awaits us we anticipate fasting."**

For many of us Jesus' words are nonsense because just as a boy cannot imagine a pleasure greater than chocolate, we cannot imagine an intimacy greater than sex. But, as we will see in a moment, sex is nonsense compared to what is ours.

Two quick points of application before we move on. First, to the married, kiss your spouse today. The dissolution of marriage is not a call to disinterest or despair but a call to rejoice in what God has given

while he has given it. Second, to the single, take heart that marriage is not the eternal place of purpose or of pleasure. Set an example for the rest of us to remind us happiness is not equal to honeymoons and rejoicing isn't reliant upon wedding bells.

There's nothing like telling married people that you won't be married in glory. And there's nothing like telling single people that they may eternally be single. As someone put it, "The only call of God that Western Christians fear more than the call to missions is the call to a life of celibacy."

But Jesus has just called all of us into that eternally. However, in doing so he has reframed for us the more significant relationship which brings us into eternal and unending intimacy.

You'll notice that the Sadducee's thought that in order for heaven to be heavenly, Jesus had to make us spouses. But did you see what Jesus did instead? He moved our hope from being a spouse in order to enjoy eternity to being a son in order to enjoy eternity.

Intimacy with a spouse, or any other person for that matter is wildly insignificant when it comes to eternity because it can't solve the real problem of death. But to be a Son of God by faith in Jesus Christ is to be a son of the resurrection.

Spouses don't raise anyone from the dead. But those who are children of God by faith in God's own son, are raised from the dead. Here is our second point this morning: **From Death to Life.**

Consider Jesus' words again, **Luke 20:37-38**, "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him."

Jesus' argument for the resurrection of the dead is simple. When God spoke to Moses and talked about a bunch of dead guys, he was affirming that there is life after death. Dead people don't need a God. Living people do. Therefore, God is a God of the living—even those who have passed in this life.

That might sound hard for us to understand because it's such a simple argument. But if he is God, then death is nothing to him.

The irony is the Sadducees record nine deaths in their argument to trap Jesus all the while thinking that the biggest issue humanity faced was who gets exclusive and possessive love. But if God is strong enough to raise the dead to life, don't you think he's wise enough and good enough to sort out all the rest? Do you really think that having brought dead people to life and furnished them with resurrection bodies that he's going to be befuddled by our relational life? Since page three of human history death has been irreversible. Despite cryo-chambers, cancer drugs, clinical research and genetic coding and we cannot reverse death. Even Lazarus who was raised, died again.

But Jesus died, rose again, and has never since died. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that he was the firstfruit and pattern of what will be true for all of us who have hope in Jesus. In fact the Bible holds up that everyone will one day be resurrected and be judged either to eternal physical hell or eternal physical heaven. But the sons of the resurrection, who are the sons of God, are those who live before God in the next because Jesus tells us in verse 38, they "all live to him" now in this life.

You see if the believer's hope for life is in the God who raises the dead, must we also believe that the believer's happiness in life is also the God who raises the dead? Expecting the primary joys of heaven to be more of man is like going to Disney World and expecting something other than Disney to satisfy. It's like going to the Super Bowl and being disappointed there's no pickle ball. Or to put it in a more fitting way, it's like getting married and not expecting the beautiful union of love to be satisfying. We were made for God, to live to God, and to be with him.

Our problem is that like the Sadducees we are often blinded to how God can satisfy us because we cannot see how the divine and the human meet in glorious, beautiful, soul-satisfying union. But in Jesus we see it.

Jesus turns to the scribes here who affirm Jesus' words on resurrection life because they to believe it. But the problem Jesus points out with them is that belief in resurrection life is nothing if you don't understand the source of resurrection life.

Jesus here talks about the "Christ," who is the messiah. And just like the Sadducees couldn't accept a hope bigger than human intimacy—the scribes too were tied to human hope. They thought the messiah, being from the line of David would be a mere man. But Jesus leans into the lynch pin of everything when he moves the messianic identity: **From Human Son to Eternal Savior.**

Again, Jesus' argument is simple but commentators and critics alike wrestle over the complexity of its depth. Turning to the scribes he says, **Luke 20:41**, "How can they say that the Christ is David's son? For David himself says in the book of Psalms, 'The LORD says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.' David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son."

Jesus is quoting Psalm 110 here, which is a Psalm written by David. In the Psalm David takes up the role of narrator and he is narrating a sort of royal ceremony where the LORD (YHWH) says to 'my Lord.' This Lord, David's Lord, is seen the Psalm as being the true royal king (vs. 2) and the true eternal priest forever (vs. 4).

So in essence David himself is saying that the messiah is not just a man, but he is pre-existent, he already exists and exists forever. In other words the messiah is not only David's son, but he is David's eternally existing God in the flesh.

Look at how Paul presents Jesus in Romans. He opens it telling us of the good news of Jesus (**Romans 1:3-6**) "was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ."

In the virgin birth we see Jesus as the Son of David in the flesh, but in the resurrection we see that he is also the Son of God in full divinity. The purpose of which is to bring about obedience of faith.

One of the biggest problems we have in this world is understanding how sinful humans can be made right with God. That, more than anything else, contributes to your experiential paranoia about joy. We don't know how humans can be satisfied in the divine—that is until we see Jesus who is fully God and fully man.

That is to say it's only in Jesus as the perfect man, only in Jesus in his glorious resurrection, that we can ever see what it truly means to "live to God," but more than that we can see how it is perfectly satisfying.

It satisfied the problem of sin because Jesus died for our sins, so that by faith we might be risen up not to judgement but by his righteousness to life. In this messiah, everything was going to be made right. Scepters would be given, enemies would be subjected, death itself would look dumb.

But it also satisfies the problem of intimacy and joy because through faith in Jesus Christ we are restored to God—the only eternal joy. Humanity is redeemed through the Christ. What are we redeemed to? The joy of God himself. In the 6th Century the church confessed this in the Athanasian Creed: **"[Jesus] although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of manhood into God."**

What does this mean? Well it means that the purpose of God's messiah was not that God would become flesh, but that what was flesh would be restored to God. When Jesus took on flesh he showed us that humanity is significant. Living, breathing, eating, marrying, relating, all of that is good. But it is not the end for which we were made. Jesus did not take on flesh so that God could enjoy what is human, Jesus took on flesh so that humans by grace through faith can enjoy God.

If you want eternal joy, you'd better make sure that the object of your affection is itself eternal. Dear church, there is only one eternal, infinite and unending being and he has called us to himself in Jesus Christ.

Augustine said it this way: **"Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till we come to thee."** Humanity was made to find its joy and its life in God. What sin torn asunder—Christ has restored. Why does human marriage go away? Because the shadow is swallowed up by the sun. Speaking of marriage in **Ephesians 5:32**, Paul says this mystery is profound and I am saying that it refers to Christ and to the church."

C.S. Lewis says it again this way when we are befuddled at the lack of exclusive marital love: **"It is not that we have loved them too much, but that we did not quite understand what we were loving. It is not that we shall be asked to turn from them, so dearly familiar, to a stranger. When we see the face of God we shall know that we have always known it."**

In other words all the joys of this life are only joyful in that it leads us to Jesus as our joy. You may think that what Jesus presents in the resurrection to glory is an undressing of humanity. But Paul tells us that it's actually the full dressing. **2 Corinthians 5:4-5**, "For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by what is life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee."

All the joys of this world are made inexhaustible when we realize that at the bottom of them all is an arrow that points us to Jesus Christ. Do not worship what the filter of death will catch, but worship the one who crushed death and gives us life.

The question is not: Can God's beauty account for the joys of humanity? But can your humanity account for the joy of God? No! It can't, but through Jesus it will.

One author put it this ways, **"In truth, we will be uninterested in sexuality in Heaven not because it is 'atrophied,' but because it is 'engulfed'"** (Martindale).

Dear Christian, today, look at the joys of this world—their presence and their absence—in light of what this Messiah has done to restore you to God. Humanity is satisfied in the divine because the Divine plan was satisfied in the Divine Son.

The doctrine of the resurrection through Jesus is a present problem. No sex? Jabberwocky! No marriage? How can it be? But when we get to glory and we encounter the full force of joy in Jesus Christ the things of this world will decompose into nonsense itself.