

Luke 20:27-21:4: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 20 verse 27 to chapter 21 verse 4. Afterward the woman also died.

In the resurrection therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife. 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. 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 God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him. Then some of the scribes answered, Teacher, you have spoken well, for they no longer dared to ask him any questions. But he said to them, How can they say that the Christ is David's son? For David himself says in the book of Psalms, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

[1 : 29] David thus calls him Lord. So how is he his son? And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers.

They will receive the greater condemnation. Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins.

And he said, Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them, for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.

Moving into the second half of Luke chapter 20, Jesus continues his challenge with the leaders of the people. Now he's challenged with the Sadducees, who deny the resurrection. They give the example of a man who dies, and then his wife marries his brother, and then he dies, and then his brother, and then he dies, and so on with a number of brothers.

The question being, whose wife is she in the resurrection? This depends, of course, upon the Levirate law in Deuteronomy chapter 25 verses 5 to 6. 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.

[2 : 50] Her husband's brother shall go into her, and take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.

The purpose of this commandment is in large measure to deal with the threat of death. Death can condemn people to futility. It can mean that someone's name is lost and cut off, and so the brother is there to come in and to raise up seed for his brother who has died.

Acting on his brother's behalf, he ensures that his brother's name is not blotted out. There are two forms of death here. There's the physical death, and then there's also the death of one's legacy.

And the brother steps in to ensure that that second form of death does not befall his brother.

Jesus answers the Sadducees by drawing a contrast between the sons of this age and the sons of the resurrection. Jesus' argument operates on the basis of the belief that marriage exists in this age to fill and replenish the earth, to fulfil humanity's calling and blessing to be fruitful and multiply, and also to deal with the threat of death which would cut off humanity.

The practice of levirate marriage is a very pronounced way of dealing with that second issue, marriage in the face of death, so that life is continued. However, in the resurrection, there is a new principle of generation.

[4 : 11] Humanity is no longer founded in the event of birth, as the human race descends one generation from another, being born and dying in the context of marriage. No. The new principle is that of resurrection, regeneration.

Humanity in this situation would be like the angels. The angels don't marry. They're a non-procreating living host. The resurrection isn't just revivification and return to our existing form of life.

It's the start of something new. And it also has an eschatological character. I believe that this might be partly in view when he talks about the angels. The angels are a complete host.

They do not bear offspring. However, the full complement of humanity has yet to be born.

Humanity, unlike the angels, is a growing number. However, in the new heavens and the new earth, humanity will be a fixed number of persons, having reached their final state.

And just as the angels are stewards of the heavenly temple, rulers under God and messengers under him, so humanity will achieve its full maturity. We will no longer be under the rule and the guidance of the angels, but will have risen into the full maturity of sons.

[5 : 18] We will be sons of God because we are sons of the resurrection. The language of sons of God is used of the angels in a number of parts of scripture, in Job chapter 1, in Genesis chapter 6, and in some of the Psalms.

It presents the angels as representatives of God, as those who reflect God's character and act in his name. And humanity will rise to that stage. We might also add on the side here that humanity will be the bride of Christ.

The angels are always spoken of as males. Zechariah 5 is not an exception. The angels are a band of brothers. But humanity differs from the angels in having women. Women are the glory of the human race, as Paul can talk about in 1 Corinthians chapter 11.

And just as the king in taking a bride will raise her up over all the noblemen, so humanity will be raised up over all of the angels as the bride of Christ.

Because we don't die anymore after the resurrection, and because the chief purpose of marriage has been achieved, now that there is no longer any need for birth, there is no longer marriage or giving in marriage in the resurrection.

[6 : 21] I certainly do not believe that this means that we cease to be male and female in the resurrection. Nor do I believe that this means that the goods of marriage, associated with companionship and things like that, simply cease.

Rather, the point is that an institution that existed for the purpose primarily of procreation is no longer needed, because resurrection has taken its place. To prove the resurrection, Jesus refers to the story of the Exodus.

I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel is being raised up from slavery, and this is a raising up of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The action of the Exodus is being done in large measure on their behalf.

This implies future resurrection of them, that their part in history has not ceased. Why would it speak of God being their God? God is not the God of the dead. God is not the God of those who are in the past.

God is the living God. And so for God to be defined by those who are dead, and never going to come back again, does not make sense. Rather, if the living God refers to himself in terms of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then they are not ultimately dead.

[7 : 28] Having answered the question of the Sadducees so effectively, Jesus is congratulated by some of the scribes, and then he poses them a question. The question that he poses them concerns Psalm 110.

It's a Davidic Psalm in which David refers to the Christ, the Messiah, as his Lord. And this makes no sense if the Christ is merely his son. The Christ seems to be more than merely the son of David according to the flesh.

How can we make sense of this? It's difficult to provide an answer without an understanding of the divinity of Christ. Jesus addresses his disciples and warns them concerning the scribes, but ensuring that the rest of the crowds can overhear.

He warns them of their love of the praise of men. He warns them of their spiritually abusive character, and the way in which they do not truly seek the face of God. They merely make long prayers as a pretense.

