Are You Satisfied With Just Whiffs of Joy?
Luke 20: 27 - 40

"If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?" *John Piper, God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love as the Gift of Himself*

- How would you answer that question this morning?
  - Are you so satisfied with just the little whiffs of joy we catch here on earth that you have no real appetite for the true joy of heaven: Jesus Himself?
- That question exposes the core tension in our text today. In Luke 20, a group of religious leaders called the Sadducees come to trap Jesus with another trick question—much like the question about paying taxes to Caesar we looked at last week.
  - The irony is that the Sadducees didn't even believe in the resurrection or eternal life. Yet they bring a ridiculous hypothetical scenario based on Old Testament marriage laws to try to discredit Him.
  - In doing so, they make the very mistake so many of us make today: they project earthly existence onto eternity, treating eternal life as nothing more than a continuation of earthly life, but with all the difficulties removed.[K1]
  - In that kind of mindset, Jesus is merely a means to an end, rather than the ultimate end. In that kind of a mindset, the real treasure of our hearts is friends, food, activities, beauty, and pleasure, not Jesus.
- Oftentimes, rather than letting the Author of eternity shape our hope, we let our own small appetites define what we believe—assuming that the good gifts we experience now are the ultimate destination.
  - To help us see how absurd this kind of thinking really is, picture stepping through the front door on Thanksgiving Day. The kitchen fills the entire house with the rich aromas of roasting turkey, herbs, and warm pies. It triggers memories, brings a smile, and stirs up our deepest cravings. But no one stands in the hallway taking deep breaths and says, "That smell is so satisfying, I don't think I need to sit down to eat." The aroma is real and wonderful, but it is a foretaste—it exists to awaken your hunger for the meal itself, not to replace it.
    - Our earthly relationships—even marriage—are like that aroma. They are genuine gifts that give off the fragrance of God's goodness. But they are not the feast. The tragedy is when we try to live on the aroma, expecting human beings to satisfy a hunger that only the feast of Christ Himself can fill.[K2]
- But it doesn't have to be that way. Rather than treating the aroma of earthly joys as the main course, what if you were free to receive them as a foretaste of the all-satisfying life found in Christ?

Luke 20: 27 – 40 There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, 28 and 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. 29 Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. 30 And the second 31 and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. 32 Afterward the woman also died. 33 In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife."

34 And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 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, 36 for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 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. 38 Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him." 39 Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well." 40 For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

- This encounter takes place during the final week of Jesus' public ministry in Jerusalem. After His triumphal entry on Palm Sunday, Jesus taught daily in the Temple courts. Threat by threat, rival religious groups approached Him, hoping to trap Him and destroy His credibility before the crowds.
- In today's passage, the challenge comes from the Sadducees. They were the wealthy, aristocratic priestly class who controlled Temple operations and collaborated with Rome to maintain their hold on Jewish society.[K3]
    - Unlike their rivals, the Pharisees, the Sadducees rejected any belief in bodily resurrection, angels, or spirits. If it wasn't in the first five books of Moses—the Torah—they didn't accept it.
- To try to prove their belief that any talk of a resurrection is absurd, they come to Jesus and present him with an exaggerated scenario based on the Levirate marriage law in Deuteronomy 25. Under that law, if a married man died without children, his brother was required to marry the widow so an heir could carry on the family name and preserve their inheritance in the Promised Land.
    - With smug confidence, the Sadducees construct a riddle: seven brothers consecutively marry the same woman, each dying childless. Finally, the woman dies. Then comes their trap: "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife."
    - To the Sadducees, the resurrection sounded ridiculous because they could only conceive of eternity as a longer version of this present earthly existence.
- But Jesus exposes that their skepticism stems from two fundamental errors: they know neither the power of God nor the nature of the age to come. He answers their trap in two decisive movements.
    - First, in verses 34–36, Jesus draws a radical contrast between "the sons of this age" and "those who are considered worthy to attain to that age." In this present age, human beings marry and are given in marriage. Why? Because death reigns.
        - Marriage exists in this world partly to bring forth children so the human race and family lines do not perish.
        - But in the resurrection, believers cannot die anymore. They are equal to angels—not in the sense of sprouting wings or becoming

disembodied spirits, but immortal, holy, and completely devoted to the worship and glory of God. When death has been swallowed up, the institutional necessity of marriage passes away.

- Second, Jesus meets them on their own theological home turf. Quoting Exodus 3:6 from the burning bush—the very Torah they claimed as their sole authority—Jesus points to how God revealed Himself to Moses: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."
  - He did not say, "I was their God." Hundreds of years after these patriarchs had been laid in the dust, God declared Himself to still be their God in the present tense. As Jesus declares in verses 37–38: "Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him."
    - God's covenant promises do not expire at the cemetery gates.
  - By calling all believers "sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (v. 36), Jesus also offers a profound dignity. In ancient property law, only sons could inherit an estate. By designating every believer as a "son," Jesus assures every woman and man in His Church that they have a place in the Father's house as full joint heirs with Him of the Father's eternal kingdom.
    - For happily married couples, hearing that there is no marriage in heaven can sound disorienting, even disappointing. We wonder: "How can eternity be complete without the spouse who has walked beside me through thick and thin?"
    - As a pastor who has ministered to widows, often times when a spouse dies, it is if the partner still alive has also died. That's because in a healthy marriage the two really do become one, so for the one still alive it is very much as if part of them has died. When two people experience that, it is hard to imagine that eternity could be a joyful, satisfying experience without that beloved one by your side.
    - But earthly marriage, as sacred and good as it is, was never designed to be the ultimate reality. It is a temporary signpost.[K4]
    - The Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 5 that the profound mystery of human marriage exists to point to something infinitely greater: Christ and His church. Earthly marriage is just a pleasant aroma. The union with Christ that earthly marriage points to is the true feast.

Principle: In this text, Jesus is teaching us that true life is anchored in covenant union with the God of the living.

- So whatever state we find ourselves in today, happily married, struggling in marriage, single, widowed, and divorced, none of us will miss out the ultimate blessings of eternity. In the age to come, every child of God enters the fullness of what marriage only faintly foreshadows in this life.

2 Corinthians 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

- True life is not measured by the shadows of this present age, but by eternal fellowship with the God of the living.
- Yet, despite this glorious promise, our hearts consistently struggle to believe that God Himself is enough.

Problem: As a result, we treat eternal life as merely an extension of earthly comforts and human relationships, seeking satisfaction apart from God Himself.

- The Sadducees could only imagine an eternity governed by earthly legalism, property rights, and domestic claims (Luke 20:28–33). Their absurd riddle about seven brothers and one widow exposes a soul entirely blind to the transcendent majesty of God's presence. They assumed that if eternity existed at all, it must simply be a continuation of the systems they could manage and control.
    - But before we judge them too harshly, we should recognize that our hearts naturally drift in the very same direction. We resist the supreme sufficiency of God, preferring created gifts over the Giver. We project our finite, earthly securities into eternity because our fallen hearts struggle to fathom finding our total joy, identity, and life in Christ alone.
        - If we are honest, many of us harbor a quiet dread beneath the surface: "If I cannot have my spouse or my child in heaven, how could I ever be truly happy?"
        - While it is right and godly to long for the salvation of those we love, believing we cannot be satisfied in eternity without human marriage exposes something deep within us. Believing that we need Jesus plus something else to be eternally happy, reveals the truth to our hearts that **we don't really believe Jesus is enough to satisfy the deepest longings of our heart.**[K5]
    - Without realizing it, we act just like the Sadducees. We treat eternal life as nothing more than an upgraded extension of earthly life—reducing heaven to family reunions, mansions over the hilltop, streets of gold, and reunions with departed pets, while treating Christ as merely the way to everything else that our hearts really want. We convince ourselves that we could be perfectly happy in heaven even if Christ were not there, as long as we have these other things.
- And we think this way because here on earth, we look to marriage and family to validate our worth, secure our identity, and guarantee our emotional safety apart from God.
    - Think of how secular culture idolizes the romantic "soulmate" as our ultimate savior, while popular sentimental religion promises an afterlife centered entirely around eternal domestic comfort. Secular culture tries to make heaven on earth, while religious sentimentalism tries to make earth on heaven.
    - But both fail because both demand that created beings provide what only the Creator can give. When we turn a spouse, a child, or a family into our

functional Messiah, we place an impossible, crushing weight on their shoulders. We expect an incomplete, imperfect human being to complete and fulfill us.

- The consequences are devastating. We live in chronic anxiety over losing those we love, and we become angry, manipulative, or bitter whenever they fail to provide the worth, identity, and happiness to us that they were never designed to supply. By worshiping the gift rather than the Giver, we poison the very relationships we are trying to protect.
- We cannot save ourselves from this relational idolatry, nor can we manufacture our own worthiness to stand before the God of the living. We desperately need a Savior who can forgive our unfaithfulness and give us true, indestructible life.

Gospel: So, God sent His Son Jesus to enter death for us and then become the first fruits of the resurrection so that through union with Him we receive indestructible, all-satisfying life.

- When we demand that a spouse, child, or family serve as our functional Messiah, we will always be crushed by disappointment. Earthly relationships are frail, flawed, and shadowed by the cemetery.[K6]
    - We cannot look to a being who is flawed and destructible themselves, to save us. We need a perfect, indestructible Savior—and we need grace to forgive our relational idolatry, pardon our spiritual adultery, and answer our complete unworthiness to inherit the age to come.
- And that grace is precisely what God has lavished upon us in His Son.
- In verse 35, Jesus spoke of those who are "considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead." How can anyone who has worshiped created gifts ever be counted worthy? We can't. So, as the Apostle Paul writes in **Romans 4:25**, Jesus "was delivered over to death for our trespasses and was raised to life for our justification."
    - To be justified means that the Judge of heaven declares you righteous in His sight. Christ took our unworthiness, the filthy rags of our sinful lives, and in exchange, God clothes us in His perfect righteousness.
        - His resurrection to an indestructible life is the divine receipt, proving that our debt is canceled in full and guaranteeing that all who are united to Him will share in His victory over the grave.[K7] Through Him, we are adopted as "sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (v. 36).
- Look at the glorious contrast in our text: In the Sadducees' riddle, seven mortal brothers step forward. Each one tries to sustain the family line; each one fails; and one by one, all seven fall before the relentless power of death, leaving a destitute widow behind.
    - But Jesus is the True and Greater Bridegroom! He did not run from death. He stepped into our mortality. On the cross, bearing our guilt and the defilement of our idolatry, the eternal fellowship between Father and Son was ruptured in agonizing darkness.

- Jesus experienced the cosmic loss of divine favor and human connection—crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—so that we might be brought into unbreakable covenant union with the living God.
    - He died our death, and on the third day, He broke the power of the grave forever! Unlike the seven brothers of this passing age, Jesus will never die again. He will never leave His bride a widow, and He will never leave His children as orphans. He is the deathless Bridegroom who lives to love us forever.
- In this Great Exchange, Christ absorbed our mortality, our relational brokenness, and our condemnation at the cross, and in return clothes us with His perfect worthiness, giving us an eternity of all-satisfying union with the Father.
- When the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see what Christ has done for us, it reorders the deepest affections of our hearts. Earthly marriage and family bonds are dethroned as our functional saviors and restored to their true, beautiful design: gracious, temporary signposts pointing to the eternal Marriage Supper of the Lamb.
    - The quiet dread that eternity might be lonely, cold, or insufficient evaporates in the radiant warmth of His presence. We discover that we are loved with an everlasting love, and that in His presence there is fullness of joy.
- Because our eternal life is anchored in this risen Savior, everything changes for how we live and love right now.

Response: Rooted in His grace, we are freed to enjoy earthly relationships as temporary gifts while feasting on the eternal life found in Christ alone.

- Apart from Christ, we clutch at earthly relationships with possessive anxiety, demanding that our spouses, children, and friends carry the unbearable weight of providing our ultimate validation and security.
    - But in Christ, adopted as sons of the resurrection and empowered by His indwelling Spirit, we are liberated to hold those same relationships with open-handed thanksgiving. We are anchored in the rock-solid reality that Christ is our life, and our permanent family is the household of faith.
- In Luke 20:36, Jesus declares that in the resurrection, believers are "equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." And then in verse 38, He reveals what this sonship truly means: "for all live to him."
    - Real life, indestructible joy, and ultimate belonging are in Jesus, through Jesus, and with Jesus forever. When that truth grips our souls, the words of **Psalm 73:25–26** become the natural song of our hearts:

"Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

    - The best things on this earth—as wonderful and sweet as they are—are just faint aromas of the banquet God has prepared for those who love Him (**1 Cor. 2:9**). Because Christ was raised for our justification, we are empowered to "fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen,

since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (**2 Cor. 4:18)**.

- What does this look like in everyday life?
  - Consider your Thanksgiving gathering this week. How often do we walk into family holidays burdened with unrealistic expectations—demanding that everyone behave, that conversations go perfectly, and that our family provide us with Norman Rockwellesk picture perfect holiday warmth and validation? When they fall short, we end up stressed, irritable, and resentful.
    - We cry out, "You ruined my Thanksgiving!" That is what happens when our thanksgiving is anchored in other humans who are adrift themselves.
    - But how can thanksgiving rooted in Christ's finished work on the cross ever be ruined? As Hebrews so beautifully says, when our hope is anchored in Christ, it holds firm and secure.
      - Christ's justifying work on the cross is finished. It is perfect, and complete, so a heart anchored in Christ and filled with true thanksgiving, isn't deterred by circumstances or the thoughtless, rude actions of others.
- When you know that you are already an adopted son or daughter of the resurrection, you are free to enjoy your family without demanding that they act as your functional saviors.
  - If they are difficult, you are free to offer patience, because you have received boundless patience from Christ.
  - If there is an empty chair at your table this Thanksgiving because of the death of a spouse, a parent, or a child, your grief is real, but it is not hopeless. You know that death does not have the final word—because our God is the God of the living, and everyone in Christ lives to Him.
  - If you are single, or divorced, or have a marriage in which you feel alone: you don't have to wait for the age to come to experience the fullness of intimacy. Your worth is not defined by a wedding band, and your belonging is not second-class. You are betrothed to the deathless King of glory right now. Live in the joy of knowing Jesus and being known by him.
- Rather than treating the aroma of earthly joys as the main course, we get to receive them as a foretaste of the all-satisfying life found in Christ. We are free to love our spouses, cherish our children, enjoy the moment, and serve our friends deeply today, precisely because we are no longer asking them to be our gods.
  - The rich aroma of a Thanksgiving meal filling the house is real, delightful, and comforting. But it is only a sign. It is a foretaste reminding us that something far greater is coming.
  - Everything in this passing world—our earthly marriages, our family traditions, our sweetest holidays, and even the bread and cup of the Communion Table set before us today—are the fragrant aroma pointing to what will one day be ours at the eternal Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Revelation 19:6–9 "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready… Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb!"

- When Jesus silenced the Sadducees, He reminded them of God's covenant name: "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."
    - Think for a moment about Jacob. Remember how deeply he loved Rachel? He loved her so passionately that he agreed to work seven hard years of manual labor just to have her as his bride. Scripture says those seven years seemed to him like only a few days because of his love for her.
    - But on his wedding day, Laban deceived him and gave him Leah, instead. Undeterred, Jacob agreed to work another seven years in the scorched fields and freezing nights—fourteen years in all—because he would stop at nothing to claim the bride he loved.
- Now look at Jesus, the True and Greater Bridegroom.[K8]
    - Consider what Jesus did to have you. He didn't just work seven years, or fourteen years. He stepped out of eternal glory. He took on your mortality, bore every one of your sins, and suffered, bled, and died on a Roman cross to make you His own.
    - You are His Rachel. You were the joy set before Him as He endured the cross, despising its shame. In Christ, you are loved more deeply and unconditionally than you could ever dare to hope.
- So, this Thanksgiving week, stop trying to survive on the aroma. Stop asking your spouse, your children, or your earthly circumstances to be your Savior. They cannot bear that weight—and they were never meant to.
    - Instead, look at the Table set before us. It displays the full, lavish extent of His self-giving love.
    - As you come to the Table this morning, listen for His voice speaking over your weary soul: "See how I have loved you, and given Myself for you. Pull up a chair. Rest in My finished work, and feast on the indestructible life that is yours in Me forever."