

Exploding Expectations

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- [0 : 0 0] In 1884, Edwin Abbott published a book called Flatland, a romance of many dimensions. In this story, the protagonist, a square, lived in a two-dimensional world, but then dreams of visiting a one-dimensional world, and then is visited by a three-dimensional sphere who comes to help him see the possibility of a world with three dimensions. In his dialogue with the sphere, as he begins to grasp this, he asks a series of questions. If you're not looking, I'm going to hold up a piece of paper to try to show you what he's asking when he asks us. In one dimension, does not a moving point produce a line with two terminal points? Here's your line. In two dimensions, does not a moving line, so this line is moving towards me, create, produce a square, or a rectangle in this case, with four terminal points?
- [1 : 2 6] One, two, three, four. Now we're in two dimensions. Okay? Now when you take this and you move it through space like this, in three dimensions does not a moving square produce a blessed being, a cube with eight terminal points. Can't fold this into a cube, but imagine six sides just like a dice, right? So it's got eight points all the way around, four in the bottom, four in the top. And then he asks the question. And that cube in four dimensions shall not a moving cube that result in a still more divine organization with 16 terminal points. Okay, are you lost yet? Yeah. Because we just transcended our three-dimensional world with that last question, didn't we? It's hard to imagine a four-dimensional world, and yet the whole purpose of his book. Well, his book had multiple purposes. One was a critique of Victorian society, and particularly the roles of gender in Victorian society. Secondly, it had a great profound mathematical basis.
- [2 : 3 8] It's still being used today that that picture of all you have to do is keep increasing the space, and you get more dimensions. But he also was making a theological point. Could it be that the world is more than it seems? Could it be that the world that we live in is more than nearly subject to the laws of nature? Could it be that if a transcendent and supernatural God interacts with our three-dimensional natural world, could it be that we would find surprising things that challenge and stretch our minds beyond what we would expect or imagine? C.S. Lewis was a big fan of Flatland. He actually quotes it multiple times in his writings in Miracles and in Mere Christianity. When he talks about in Mere Christianity, the Trinity, he asks a similar set of questions. That if the Christian God is depicted, we usually think of one person being one being. And then God in the Bible is depicted as one God in three persons.

[4 : 01] And we think, how could this be? He says, well, imagine that fourth dimension, the Flatland. Maybe we, because we are so stuck in our thinking of the world as we see it, maybe we can't imagine what it would be like.

If a God who is transcendent and supernatural does exist, how does this redefine what our world is like, how does this redefine how our understanding of him could change?

Well, friends, as we continue in our series in the book of Luke this morning, this idea will inform how we understand what happens in the next part of Luke.

We're looking in Luke chapter 20. If you want to turn there in your Bible, it's page 827 in the Pew Bibles. We're continuing through this series in the book of Luke.

And just in case you're visiting or wondering, remember, in this part of Luke, Jesus, having done his ministry in Galilee and having moved towards Jerusalem, has now arrived in Jerusalem heading to the cross and to the resurrection.

[5 : 12] In this context, there's severe conflict that's increasing with the religious leaders and authority of the day, while the crowds continue to admire Jesus and his teaching.

And through these conflicts and through these interactions, Jesus is constantly clarifying the nature of the kingdom of God and the nature of whom he is and pointing to himself as the center of the establishment of that kingdom on this earth.

And this brings us to Luke chapter 20, starting in verse 27. We're going to read 27 through 44. Let's read this together.

There came to him some Sadducees, those that deny that there is a resurrection. 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.

Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife and died without children, and the second and the third took her. And likewise, all seven left no children and died.

[6 : 25] Afterwards, the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven have her as a 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, 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. And 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.

[7 : 47] And David thus calls him Lord. So how is he his son? Let's pray. Lord, we are thankful this morning to you for your word.

And we are thankful for the fact that we are not left to grasp after you or to imagine you on our own. But God, you have revealed yourself.

You've revealed yourself in the person of Jesus. And you have revealed yourself through this book, the Bible, so that we might know who you are. And God, I pray this morning you help give us clarity and greater understanding of who you are this morning.

And Lord, that as we understand you more, that our hearts will be turned towards you. Lord, in faith, in devotion, in love, in loyalty, in service.

Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. So how does Jesus in these two interactions stretch our understanding of his kingdom and of himself?

[8 : 57] Well, in the first section he answers a question from his opponents, and then that's in verses 27 through 40, and then in 41 through 44, he asks a question of his own. We're going to look at exactly what he's doing.

We'll look at the first interaction first, and then the second one. So in the first one, in verses 27 through 40, we see that Jesus is redefining our understanding about relationships in eternity.

Who are the Sadducees? This is the one time in the book of Luke that the Sadducees show up, and it's important, and I want to give you just a brief picture of the political layout, the political spiritual layout of Jerusalem in the first century.

The Jewish people were ruled by a group called the Sanhedrin, which is about 70 people who were his elders who oversaw, politically and religiously, the people of Israel in that day.

They included, they were made up of chief priests and scribes and teachers of the law, and there was an extended community about them that you see referred to over and over again in the book of Luke.

[10 : 06] Now, among this structure then, there were two parties, kind of like we have today. On one hand, there were the Pharisees. The Pharisees were more theologically progressive.

That is, they had a continually growing tradition of truths in their understanding of the Old Testament, but they were politically conservative and resistant to Roman rule and to compromise.

The other party were the Sadducees, and the Sadducees actually were probably the greater party in terms of numbers. They had probably more people on the Sanhedrin, but they were more theologically conservative.

They held up only the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, as the authoritative word of God, so they didn't believe in things like angels, or demons, or the afterlife, or judgment.

And most importantly, as is seen here and in other places like Acts 23, they did not believe in resurrection. They did not believe that people would be resurrected from the dead at all.

[11 : 10] They thought that this is the life you lived, and then you died. And it actually made them politically pragmatists, so they were more collaborators with the Roman rulers than opponents. But it's in this context, then, that they come to Jesus after a series of other questions, probably from more on the Pharisee side.

Now the Sadducees weigh in with their question, and it looks like they're trying to co-opt him. Sort of say, hey, don't you agree with us? And the question they ask is based on...

It feels pretty obscure, doesn't it? It's based on a law in Deuteronomy 25, where it says, in verses 5 and 6, It says, The family lineage, because that was connected with wealth and land and all sorts of important things in the society.

This is the kind of thing you see in Genesis 38, where Tamar was wedded to one of Judah's sons, and then two others, and they died, and their failure to fulfill this...

It's also behind the story of Ruth, and how Boaz interacts with Ruth in chapter 4, how he has to properly navigate the laws of love and marriage.

[12 : 56] But the point of their question is, if this is what God instructs us about how marriage works, isn't it ridiculous to think that there could be a resurrection?

Because if there were a resurrection, and we were just raised back to life, you've got one woman, and seven brothers, and they're all married? That's the most ludicrous thing I've ever heard.

That's what they would have thought of. That's what they would have imagined. And that's the challenge. And so they're using the law as an example of, if this law is real, then there's no way the resurrection can be true.

And Jesus' response challenges and expands their understanding of human relationships in life to come, and what eternity could look like.

So first, he affirms, like, yeah, that would be weird. If people were given in marriage, like, one marriage is still affirmed, one man, one woman. We don't do those things.

[14 : 11] So yes, that would be weird. If in this age, that was all we had, and if the age become just like this one, that's exactly what it would look like. But then he goes on.

You see this in verse 35. But to those who are considered worthy of attaining to the age to come, that is, those who are God's people who are going to be with Him forever, it does not work that way.

They are not given in marriage, nor do they take wives for themselves, because there's no more marriage. in eternity. Not the way it is here.

For a number of reasons. One is because when you enter into eternity, you're going to live forever. One of the great purposes of marriage is procreation, and the continuation of the human race. That will no longer be necessary when nobody ever dies.

So there will be no more need for that aspect of marriage. But even more importantly, your relationships will change.

[15 : 24] Often, in this age, our marital relationships, our family relationships, become the most important thing about us. And what Jesus says here is, the most important thing, is that you are going to be called the Son of God, and the Son of Resurrection.

And here, just in case you're wondering why he uses Son language, Son is a role, not a gendered word. Here, it's a matter of, you are fully receiving the inheritance of the one who is bestowing it upon you.

Right? So, so what he's saying is, what you think right now is so important in this marital relationship is going to become inconsequential, because you are now going to be in a new family.

You are going to be in the family of God. And you will be accepted as a son or as a daughter with full standing, with full inheritance, with full rights, and with an eternal relationship with God himself.

And in fact, in other parts of Scripture, that is pictured of the marriage between God and his people. This beautiful, eternal relationship of mutual love.

[16 : 39] God's love for us, his people, and our responding love to him as our Lord, as our King, as our Savior. This is the picture that Jesus brings back to them.

And he says, you don't understand. You're thinking that the next stage is going to be just like this one. You're thinking three-dimensionally. Let me expand your brains.

And just in case you think I'm making this up, he continues on in verse 37 and following. Do you see what he says here? He says, look, this even comes from the very place where your authority comes from, the Torah, the first five books of the Bible.

Do you remember God when he appeared to Moses at the burning bush? Do you know that story? What did he say? I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are not dead people.

It doesn't say I was the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob when they were alive and now they're dead and that doesn't matter anymore. I am the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob today.

[17 : 51] God is the God of the living, not the dead. Therefore, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are in some way alive today. And that's why we believe in the resurrection.

And that's why they too are part of this grand family that I am portraying to you as going to be the reality of our existence in the age to come for all who are in God's family.

For all who are connected to God forever, they will live with Him forever. And what a great joy it is. Now, these may not be the questions that are burning in your mind.

Does the resurrection really be proved by those things? Leveret marriage probably hasn't crossed your mind this week. I would imagine. But these were the questions that the Sadducee brought to Him saying, hey, we want you to be on our side and we're going to try it.

We're going to throw you our best curveball to see if you can play ball with us or if you'll agree with us because you've either denied the resurrection and you agree with us or you've got to solve this problem.

[19 : 10] And Jesus explodes their world view and stretches their mind and their imagination to think of the kingdom of God as bigger than they'd imagined and to think of being a part of the people of God as greater than they could ever hope.

And that's how the people respond. Do you see at the end of that section verse 39 some of the scribes, interestingly not the Sadducees, it's hard to say where the scribes fit in, but some say good answer Jesus, alright, we're convinced.

Just like we've seen before. People come to Him, they ask Him hard questions. And when He gives them an answer based in the truth of the scriptures, in the truth of reality, they shut their mouths before Him.

The next stage is going to be greater and more different than you imagine. So what does this mean for us? Well, I can preach lots of great sermons now on how to do this.

I'm going to try to do this quickly. First of all, marriage is placed in its proper context. Because marriage is a created order, it is meant to be a part of this age, it is a good and a blessing that God has given us, but it is not ultimate.

[20 : 38] The joy of sex that was given to us to have in marriage is not the ultimate joy for human existence. existence. And so this challenges perhaps our idolatry of marriage in some circles.

It challenges us to not love marriage more than God does or to value it in a way that God does not value it. It does help us understand that the purpose of marriage is to point towards this greater reality of God and His people for eternity.

And the joy for us means that the joy of that means that that's for all who have placed their faith, for all who are in God's people. They get to enjoy that for eternity.

And this affirms those who are single, that they are not second class, that they have not missed out. No, instead they are being prepared in a different way for the glory that we will all share in, in eternity.

as God's people together. And so we can be single, and we can be celibate, and we can be fully human now, and full of hope for eternity.

[22 : 02] And we can live together as a community of married and single people together, pursuing after God, without feeling threatened, or insecure, or cast, because of being one or the other.

So first, it places marriage in its greater context. And of course, this is based in a deeper thing that this passage is pointing to, and that is our human identity is most importantly grounded in how we are related to God.

people. What Jesus says here is being a son of God, a son of the resurrection, one of God's people, is the most important thing about us.

And we will all carry identities, identities of our gender, of our family, of our race, of our nationality. We will all carry identities that are related to roles.

We're a volunteer, we're in our workplaces, in our family. We will all have roles. But all of these secondary identities are meant to find their fulfillment and their glory and their goodness under the most important question, which is, how are you related to God?

[23 : 24] God. And this, then, makes us consider not only how we think about ourselves, but how we think about one another as well, isn't it?

You're probably familiar with this quote from *The Way of Glory*, C.S. Lewis, but it's worth reading again in its fullness to listen, to think about how this picture of humanity will change how we live.

C.S. Lewis writes this, It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and corruption such as the now me, if at all, only in a nightmare.

All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics.

There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations, these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat.

[25 : 02] But it is to immortals. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit.

Immortal horrors are everlasting splendors. So as Jesus expands the sacrifice's view, and our view, of what it means to be human in this world, C.S. Lewis says it ought to affect how we interact every day with each person.

Are we helping them to know God and to be one of God's children? Or are we pushing them away? Or denying God, being silent about Him in a way that will help them continue to live apart from Him?

Friends, this is the mission in the church, that we would display the glory of God so that people would come to know the greatness of His love, the depth of His mercy and grace to us in Christ, the fearsomeness of the judgment upon our sin, and the greatness of the salvation that we have in Christ.

At the very center of it all is the question of the resurrection of the dead. Because here's the thing, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then we would probably make it all up.

[26 : 42] And we're just imagining another world. But if Jesus did rise from the dead, and friends, there is good reason to believe that. There's good reason from history, there's good reason in the Bible, if this is a question that you are wrestling with, you need to go downstairs after the service to the bookstall and find someone who can help you look through those books and find something that's going to be helpful particularly for you to the questions that you have.

Recognize that if Jesus rose from the dead, then this is one of the most important questions that we could be asking our friends. Do you know the one who was raised from the dead?

What do you think about that crying? So Jesus answers the Sadducees.

He in fact silences them as he expands their worldview and blows up some of their primary theological commitments. And it seems like at this point the conversations are over.

Nobody has any more questions for them, for him. But Jesus turns the table and he has a question for them. And this is what we see in verses 41 through 44.

[28 : 04] And he said to them, and it's not sure who the them is, it might be the scribes, it might be the Sadducees, it probably is just the crowd that includes a little bit of both. And he asked them a question.

How can your understanding of King David and of the Messiah be true? Because David in the Psalms, in Psalm 110, says the Lord, that is the God who reigns on high, Yahweh, Jehovah, the Lord said to my Lord, the Messiah, Adonai, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

Why is this a challenging question? Well, because in the culture of the day, there was an understanding that you would never be greater than the Father. The Jewish people were waiting for a Messiah.

They were waiting for someone to come and restore the throne of David, to restore the kingdom of Israel under David's rule, to fulfill the promises of the 2nd Samuel 7, 12.

I said, when your days are fulfilled and you lie down to the Father, I will raise up for you an offspring after you, who shall come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom, and he shall build my house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

[29 : 27] And they're looking for the ones who are going to do that. But the cultural assumption is that that son of David would never be greater than David. He would simply be laying down the greatness of David.

That the restoration of the kingdom of David wouldn't be greater than what David had. It would simply be returning to what had been now and the lost. And it's important to understand that, because otherwise the question doesn't make sense, does it?

Because what Jesus is saying is David didn't just see this son as someone who would fulfill what he is for. But he called him my Lord.

And how can a son be revered by a father as the Lord? This does not make sense to them.

But I think when you jump to Facebook, it's David. And Jesus doesn't spell it out. We only get three verses. And the last verse that Jesus leads us with is, how is he his son also?

[30 : 34] How can it be possible that the Messiah can be both the Lord and the Son of the great King David? You're expecting a Messiah who's going to be like David, who's going to be another human king who's going to come and establish a human kingdom.

And everyone knew that Jesus was the son of David already. You go back to the beginning of Luke. You're reading through the story of Luke.

You go back to the very beginning, right? And in Luke 1.27, we understand that Joseph is in the house of David. And when the angel appears to Mary and says that this one, your child, will sit on the throne of David.

So from the very beginning of this story, this is the direction that it's going. The expectation of the Messiah is that it will be another one like David. And he comes, and he teaches with authority, and he heals.

And people think, yes, this is it. Jesus himself, in the parable of the tenants two weeks ago, said, I'm the son of the landowner.

[31 : 51] But in that parable, the landowner wasn't just the king, was he? He was God, the owner of all things.

And when Jesus poses this question to the people, what he's really saying is, who do you think I really am? Because the Messiah is greater and more different and more glorious than you could imagine.

And this is what Luke has been writing his whole gospel to tell us. Is that this Jesus is, yes, the son of David. Yes, the one who will sit on the throne.

Yes, he is a human who walks the earth to identify with us and to be our brother as a human being. But he is more than that. He is also the divine, incarnate son of God.

The second person of the Trinity who took on human flesh. And the Messiah is not simply another great human ruler. But it is the invasion of God into this world in a unique one time.

[33 : 06] So that he might be the savior that we really need. Because he's heading not for simply the restoration of a kingdom and a throne.

But he's heading for the cross and the resurrection. And as he heads for the cross, in his humanity he's able to identify with us as human beings.

And in his divinity he's able to identify with us in his sinlessness. So that he might be the perfect savior who could die in our place. And yet he didn't stay dead, but he rose from the dead.

Showing his power over sin and death. And establishing himself as a savior who will live forever. Who is the God of the living.

And will bring all who are in him along with him. Into this glorious future hope. And the scribes and the Pharisees and the chief priests and the scribes.

[34 : 13] All of whom were in different ways clinging to their earthly power and their earthly position. And their hopes for this life. Jesus comes and he explodes their hopes and their visions and their dreams.

Says there's something greater. Something greater that I have come forward. Something greater than I am. So that I might do more than you can ever ask or imagine.

In the resurrection we see all of it coming together. Pointing us to a great God who examines us to re-examine our lives.

And to respond to this God man died and resurrected for us. So we see that when Paul goes into the Areopagus in Athens and preaches a sermon about an unknown God.

As he comes to the end of it. He says. Being then God's offspring. We ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone. Or merely human.

[35 : 21] An image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked. But now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Because he has fixed the day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed. And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

This is the incredible thing. Jesus looks at these people and says who do you say I am? And the whole rest of the Gospel of Luke and the whole Christian message is saying Jesus is the Savior who because he has been raised from the dead calls all people to respond to him.

The question of are you in Christ or not is the most important question that you can ever ask for yourself.

And it is the most important question for you to ask as you are loving your neighbor and loving this world. How then do we respond to this?

[36 : 39] Well there are two things. One is that we must admit to ourselves that like in flat land we are like A square who lives in a two-dimensional world trying to understand a three-dimensional God.

We must confess our need to learn from God about who he is and what his kingdom is like and not assume that it is like the world that we live in.

Friends, there is only one way that we know how to do this and it's here. If you're here this morning and you're wondering why in the world are we talking about resurrection?

It's the most ridiculous thing in the world. The challenge is to read these accounts. Read what the gospels say. Start here to understand who God is and who Jesus is.

For those of you who have been walking with Jesus and knowing him for years and years and years. Keep reading this because we so often forget and we so easily fall back into our two-dimensional thinking about who God is and what he's up to in this world.

[38 : 10] So I know it's really simple but read your Bible because it's how we understand God. God. It's how he has made himself known to us.

But more than that it's to not only understand him but it is to know him. It is to respond to Jesus in worship and adoration.

It is to make him the most important thing in our lives. not a slice of what we do not an activity that we fit into our schedule but he is the center the gravitational center of our lives because he is this great God and great Savior.

and I became Christian back in high school it was largely because I had a couple of friends and you know they were a worldly Christian and I was not very impressed I thought it was kind of silly and I mocked them for their faith but you know I wanted the God in the center of their lives and I didn't know I saw that they had a security and a courage a love and a commitment to truth in ways that I could not understand and as I got to know them more I saw that all of that came from the God who they trusted the God who they committed themselves to the God whose love they had experienced and were now showing the evil friends I pray that we might be those kinds of real

Christians where the reality of this supernatural transcendent God come to earth to be our Savior is so real for us that as we as C.S.

[40 : 22] was said work and play snub and marry exploit and interact rough shoulders with that we might be those people that we might know God in this way that we might help others to know them as well let's pray Lord as we talk about these things we feel like we are just touching on eternity Lord to think of these things in the same way that Jesus pointed us to a greater reality about your kingdom and about who you are God I pray I pray that you would continue by your spirit to help us to understand and to taste and see and to know more of this reality of your kingdom

Lord that we might live lives that have increased reality in them the reality of you and who you are the reality of your work in the world the reality of eternity and the way that changes how we live Lord we pray these things in Jesus name Amen Amen Well it's fun to preach this passage because we're having baptism this morning