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Since its very beginning, the church has never been uniform.

Even when Christ showed up on the scene, there were different sects within the Jewish religion. There were the Pharisees, whom we hear much about...these are the ones that tried to trap Jesus with their knowledge of Hebrew law...they were the scholars of the day...they knew the law and the prophets to the letter and had hoped Jesus would be that long-awaited, majestic Messiah they had waited so long for—Jesus let them down. There were the Zealots, who were a first century political movement...they wanted to use military action to force the occupying Roman Empire out of their land...they issued a call for revolution and a call to arms and hoped Jesus would be their great military leader—Jesus let them down. There were also the Sadducees, yet another sect within the Jewish religion...and they believed there was no life after death, in other words, they rejected belief in

the resurrection, which caused great hostility between themselves and the Pharisees and also the early Christians. It is this notion of the resurrection that is in the spotlight today.

Usually it's a group of Pharisees that approach Jesus with some riddle to try to trap him as a blasphemer, false prophet or liar. But today, surprisingly, it's the Sadducees. It's more of a story problem than a question, really...but the gist of it is, if a woman has been married seven times, whose wife will she be in heaven? (First, it's important to clarify the morality of this situation...while this idea might sound bizarre to us, it was customary in biblical times for a woman to marry her husband's brother if her husband died; any children born belonged to the deceased husband...this arrangement was called "Levirate marriage," according to traditions described in the book of Leviticus and was a way to ensure a family name was carried on. So beware, any literal Biblicists out there...be aware that if your husband dies

and you are still of child-bearing age, it is your duty to marry his brother and produce children...this awareness will make you look differently at your brothers-in-law, and will likely make family reunions a bit awkward...).

Anyway. *Jesus*, they ask, *if a woman has been married seven times, whose wife will she be in the resurrection?* **Ah ha!** they think...***this is a good one...this will stump this Jesus character for good...***you can almost see them discreetly high-fiving as they await his answer.

Jesus' answer, however, does not thrill them.

*She will be nobody's wife*, Jesus declares.

The Sadducees surely gasped.

The Pharisees dropped their scrolls and surely gasped.

The Zealots dropped their swords and surely gasped.

*What, nobody's wife? What do you **mean**, nobody's wife?*

*What's a woman without a husband? What status does she have, what position does she hold, what title can she claim? Without a husband, a woman is nothing.*

Jesus explains his answer. He addresses the Sadducees and anybody else who happens to be listening, “How ironic that you believe in tradition but not in the resurrection! How ironic that you believe more in marriage than you do in the kingdom of heaven! How ironic that you give Moses more authority than God!”

How tragically ironic that we tend to put our faith more in human institutions than in the freedom of the Gospel.

Marriage, and all other early institutions, have been created for the ordering of life on earth and are not intended to carry on into eternity. The words are “till death parts us,” after all. If the legalities that bind us in this life carry over into the afterlife, then what freedom does the future hold?

None. That is not to say *relationships* don't exist in the kingdom of heaven, because there is plenty of biblical assurance that they do...just not in the restrictive, disappointing way that we understand human relationship right now.

Think about it. Jesus comes to earth proclaiming liberation from death...physical death, yes, but also spiritual and emotional and mental and psychological death...I have been in relationships where my heart has continued to beat, but I was nonetheless dying, and I know you have, too...True, there is a beauty in human relationship and a joy beyond expression, but there is the flip side to it, too, the enduring pain and suffering brought about by human relationship, the abuse, the silent agony, the secret, unseen death of a person's will to live...do we really want this to carry on into eternity? No, because the worst parts of human relationship reveal the presence of sin in this world...and we believe in the kingdom of heaven that

sin will cease to exist...and so Jesus' answer makes beautiful sense,  
then...Freedom from the disappointment of human relationship. Imagine!

Will the woman in the Sadducees' riddle exist in the resurrection?

Yes.

Will her seven husbands? Yes.

But will she have to shuffle from one to the next as subservient wife,  
kneeling before this one, serving that one, calling this one Lord and that one  
Master? Will she suffer from this one's wrath and that one's jealousy? No,  
and that is Jesus' point.

In God's kingdom, the woman will not be so-and-so's wife, she will  
simply be *child of God*. She will no longer know the shame of being unable  
to conceive a child in a culture that valued a woman based only on her  
fertility. She will no longer know the grief of burying not one, but seven,

husbands. She will not longer have to endure the finger pointing, the name calling, the loneliness, the humiliation that marked her life.

Thank God that human institutions do not carry over into the resurrection. Thank God, though, that relationships do. Thank God that we will all be gathered together in the resurrection, free from titles and ranks and labels that harm and humiliate and disappoint...thank God that the only title that will remain is *child of God*.

Thank God that this great constellation of human relationships will be resurrected and redeemed and healed and perfected, that those things that bring pain and sorrow will die, and those things that bring joy and love will continue forever, for these things bear witness to the redeemed human condition, not the broken one we live in now...

Job stands atop a hill and proclaims into the howling wind, "My words will fade away, words written with a pen or even carved into a

rock...Everything in this life will end, but the only thing left standing is Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the universe...whom I will see in the resurrection, when my skin withers and my body dies and my heart ceases to beat...then Jesus will raise me from the dead, healed and restored, and I will see him face to face, for I know that my Redeemer lives!” So says Job, who has walked through hell and has seen his children die, his wealth go up in smoke, his cattle and livestock die, his house crumble and his own health deteriorate...even he knows that the plagues of life will pass away, and that the resurrection begins when Jesus beckons us from death back to life...even he knows he will see his wife again in the resurrection, and the children he loves so much....but this time not as dutiful wife or fearful children...but instead as children of God, like angels, free from the shackles of death, free from relationships that make us cry...reborn, restored, redeemed relationships, relationships like the ones we know now, that bring us joy and



make our spirits soar and that make our hearts swell with love, but infinitely  
better and infinitely infinite.