

# OpenTheo

## Q&A#35 Was Jesus a Fruitful Eunuch?

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Today's question: "Some have described Christ as a sort of "fruitful eunuch." Others have pointed out that he in fact has a bride. While these would be mutually exclusive in a literal sense, does the Bible require us to choose between them when taken as metaphors?"

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## Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, some have described Christ as a sort of fruitful eunuch. Others have pointed out that he in fact has a bride.

While these would be mutually exclusive in a literal sense, does the Bible require us to choose between them when taken as metaphors? Well, we can begin by rehearsing the facts. If you look through the Gospels, particularly the Gospel of John, there are themes of marriage throughout the Gospel. It's very clear that Christ is the bridegroom and he's come to get married, to have the bride prepared for him.

And this leads into the Book of Revelation where it ends up with the bride being revealed and the bride, the Lamb's wife, and the celebration of the wedding supper, and all these sorts of themes that are the culmination of the Johannine Corpus. In John we see John the Baptist as the friend of the bridegroom. We see Christ beginning his ministry at a wedding.

We see the encounter with the woman at the well, which echoes in many respects the encounters of the patriarchs with their wives at wells. And then we also see Christ as the one who meets with the woman in the garden at the end of the book with Mary Magdalene. We see Christ as the one who has his feet washed by the woman in a manner that draws attention to, I think it's Song of Songs 1 verse 12, it's an allusion to that.

And so all these marriage themes are throughout the book. And if you're missing that, you're missing some important things that are going on. Christ comes as the bridegroom and he comes to get married.

But he does not take a human, a single woman as his bride during his earthly ministry. This is not a marriage as we would tend to think about it in this worldly, this age terms. Rather, it's a marriage that's shaped by the age to come.

It's shaped by the vision of the bride as the New Jerusalem, the bride as the church. It's not the bride as a single human being who's going to reproduce with Christ and their children. No, this is a very different sort of bride that's in view.

Now, Christ talks about those who become eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. And there's a number of things that this has been taken to mean. First of all, we see the different types of eunuchs that are mentioned, some who are born eunuchs.

Now, I presume this refers to intersex persons. And then there are some who have been made eunuchs by men, which would be the way that we tend to think about eunuchs more generally. And then those who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.

What could this be a reference to? Well, I think that reference is most likely a reference to persons who have given up the calling of marriage, of bearing offspring, of having sexual relations with a partner of the other sex. And they've given that up in order to devote themselves purely to the kingdom of heaven. Now, within the ancient world, the eunuch was someone who threw their lot entirely in with the ruling dynasty.

They did not have a family of their own. And so they did not, they had all their eggs, as it were, in one basket, in the basket of the kingdom that they were serving. And so their entire hope for the future rested upon that kingdom.

And the eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven are those, I believe, who have forgone the possibility of bearing children, who have not had relations with the other sex and have not married and are those who are putting their hope for the future, their entire hope for destiny into the future, their entire hope for a dynasty, their entire hope for a generation to come to remember them upon the kingdom that they are serving. And so this is a character like Paul, for instance, who is single but serving the kingdom of God in a way

that devotes the entirety of his energies to that service and to that cause. Now, Christ, it would seem, does something very similar.

Christ does not take a human wife as his companion. Christ does not bear children. All of his weight is thrown not into this age reproduction and bearing a family and raising a family, but into the age to come, into the pursuit of his bride, the church.

Now, that would suggest that there is a framework for thinking about Christ as a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven. If we go back to Isaiah 53, I think we see themes here as well. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.

He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearer's silence, so he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment. And who will declare his generation? For he was cut off from the land of the living.

For the transgressions of my people he was stricken. And they made his grave with the wicked, but with the rich at his death, because he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Now, who will declare his generation? Christ is the servant in Isaiah, is left as someone without seed, as someone without a generation to name them.

It's as if this person is completely cut off. And later on in Isaiah, we see just a couple of chapters later, the eunuch describing himself. Thus says the Lord to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbath and choose what pleases me and hold fast my covenant, even to them I will give in my house.

Well, go back a bit earlier. Do not let the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord speak, saying, the Lord has utterly separated me from his people, nor let the eunuch say, here I am, a dry tree. And so the eunuch is someone who has no generation, no seed to name them.

In the same way, the foreigner is someone who cut off. And Christ, as the suffering servant, seems to have a condition that's aligned with both the foreigner and the eunuch, someone who has no generation and someone who's utterly cut off. And yet this is reversed.

And what we see in the verses that follow in chapter 53, yet it please the Lord to bruise him, he has put him to grief. When you make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed. He shall prolong his days and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

He shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied by his knowledge. My righteous servant shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bore the sin of many, and he made intercession for the transgressors.

And so we see a reversal of the situation of the servant. The servant who seems to have a similar position to the stranger, as he's cut off and has no seed, now he's made fruitful and he's the heart of a new people. And so both of those descriptions of Christ seem to have weight to them.

I think one of the concerns that people rightly have concerns the sort of mischief that people do with these associations. So people will use the association of Christ with the eunuch as a way of justifying the eunuch as an identity in itself. The person who's sexually ambiguous or the person who is, Christ is not someone who's living out the, some identity of the single person.

Christ is not someone who's trying to fulfil some individual sense of, validate some individual sense of who we might be. Rather, Christ is someone who is a unit for the kingdom of heaven, if we want to call it that. Christ is someone who does not take an earthly wife, does not raise an earthly family in order to take the church as his bride and in order to raise its children as his children.

And so this is a very different sort of situation from that which it can be used for, which is a validation of people's identities, a sort of Christian identity politics where single people, where people of different sexualities, whatever it is, use these texts as means of validating their identity. That's not the point of what's taking place here. Rather, the point is that Christ is the fruitful eunuch as the one who's the heavenly bridegroom, that there is a this age and the age to come tension here, that Christ forgoes the taking of a wife and the bearing of children in this age in order that he might fully devote himself to the taking of a bride and the producing offspring in the age to come in relationship to that order, in the order of the, of resurrection, not the order of sexual generation.

And so I think we need to be careful with how we use these concepts, but I think there's not any reason why they should be mutually exclusive. Both of them have biblical foundation. And when we get to a passage like Acts 8 with the encounter, Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, these themes are coming up.

So the Ethiopian eunuch is reading Isaiah 53 and he's wondering who this person can be. And he's presumably seeing something of his own experience within the story of the servant who's cut off. Now, he's coming back from Jerusalem.

He's probably been in Jerusalem and not been able to go into the holy places. He's a he may be a proselyte, but he's not someone who has admittance because he is a eunuch. But yet here in the book of Isaiah, he sees this character who has similarities with his experience.

And Philip takes that text and from that text preaches Jesus and what he has done. And I think that would involve taking the eunuch to verses like Isaiah 56, where God's promise is declared to the eunuch. And so this is the gospel.

The message of the bringing in of Jews and Gentiles, the message of Christ, the servant's work to reconcile Israel to God, but also to bring in the nations from round about to overcome the barrier between Jew and Gentile, between the stranger, the person exiled from the congregation on account of being a eunuch or account of being a foreigner. These people are now brought in. And so Christ is a sort of fruitful eunuch, but he's a fruitful eunuch within the framework of passages like Isaiah 53, passages like Matthew 19.

And these broader biblical frameworks, which would challenge the way that that can get played into a sort of identity politics notion of who the eunuch is as a sort of sexual minority or something along those lines. That's not the point of what's taking place here. Rather, the point is Christ's orientation to the age to come and what that means.

I hope that this helps. If you have any further questions, please leave them in my Curious Cat account. If you have found these videos helpful, please pass them on to your friends and even your enemies.

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