

Baby, You Were Born This Way!

Sunday was the second in a three-part sermon series exploring what the Bible says to LGBTQ people. We studied a powerfully affirming Gospel passage.

1. Warm-up Question: Sunday's sermon focused on a term used in the ancient world to describe an occupational category that came to be associated with homosexuality. In our world today, what are some occupations stereotypically associated with gay men or lesbians? Which occupations would you put at the top of the list?
2. In Jesus' culture, theologians debated whether the Law of Moses allowed a man to divorce his wife for any cause or only for a really important cause. Eventually Jesus was asked to state his position on that issue. Read Matthew 19:1-9.
 - a. In this passage, Jesus takes the view that divorce should occur only under extreme circumstances like unfaithfulness. Other New Testament passages offer additional examples of the kind of extreme circumstances justifying divorce (e.g., I Corinthians 7:10-16). Based on what Jesus says in this passage, what was his rationale for restricting divorce to extreme situations? What do you think of his position?
 - b. Many of us have gone through the pain of divorce. It's a pretty common experience in our culture, and none of us is in a position to judge anyone else (Romans 14:4). For those who've gone through a divorce, what wisdom or insight did you gain from that experience?
 - c. For those of us who have been in long-term relationship, what has that experience taught you? If you could offer a friend only one piece of advice about how to foster a long-term relationship, what would you say?
3. Some people use Jesus' words about marriage in Matthew 19 to argue that heterosexual marriage is the only acceptable way for humans to live in relationship with the blessing of God. But that interpretation ignores the rest of what Jesus goes on to say in the same passage. Read Matthew 19:10-12.
 - a. How would you characterize the disciples' reaction in verse 10? How would you paraphrase their words?
 - b. In verse 11, Jesus warns that not everyone would be able to accept what he's about to say. Why do you think he anticipated it would be so hard for many people to accept what he's going to say about eunuchs?
 - c. The last word in verse 11 – *given* – is translated from a Greek word *didome*, which means “to give something to someone; to bestow a gift.” The same word is used in John 3:16 where it says, “God so loved the world that God gave [*didome*] his only Son. . . .” What words would you use to describe the God's gift of Jesus to us?
 - d. In your own mind, what is the significance of Jesus applying the same word – *didome* – to eunuchs?
 - e. Eunuchs were a category of male servants who guarded and attended wives,

daughters, and concubines in palaces and wealthy households. As a profession, eunuchs became associated with what we today would call homosexuality. Read together the overview of ancient literature about eunuchs found on p. 3, then answer the following questions: Based on what's said in the ancient literature, what was the stereotype for how eunuchs felt about women? What was the stereotype for how they felt about men? What seemed to be the general societal attitude toward eunuchs?

- f. After using the word for gifting in verse 11, in the next verse Jesus goes on to say, "There are eunuchs who have been so from birth." In your own mind, what is the significance of the words just quoted?
- g. Some who oppose gay marriage, note that nowhere in this passage does Jesus explicitly say that "born eunuchs" are allowed to marry other men. Jeff responded with the following logical syllogism. Do you buy it?
- If some people are born gay (as Jesus affirms),
 - And if being born that way is a gift (as Jesus affirms),
 - It follows that: using that gift is a beautiful thing.

4. Given what Jesus says in Matthew 19:12 and what we've learned about eunuchs from ancient literature, Bible passages that mention eunuchs take on new significance. There are about 27 passages that use the Greek or Hebrew word for eunuch. On Sunday, Jeff highlighted one of them. Read Acts 8:4-8 and 26-39.

- a. Why do you think God called Philip away from ministering to huge crowds in Samaria to witness to a sole person, the Ethiopian Eunuch, in the desert? What may have been the divine rationale?
- b. How do you think the Ethiopian Eunuch felt when he got to Jerusalem to worship only to discover that eunuchs were banned from the temple?
- c. Read Isaiah 53:1-6. As the Ethiopian Eunuch read this passage in his chariot, what feelings might it have evoked in him? When Philip explained that this passage was about Jesus, how do you think the Ethiopian Eunuch felt about Jesus?
- d. When the Eunuch asked if he could be baptized, Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And the Eunuch replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. . . ." And Philip baptized him." Acts 8:37. Jeff noted that Philip did not inquire whether the Eunuch was a "born eunuch" or was in relationship with another man. The only thing that mattered was the Eunuch's faith. How does that make you feel?

Quick Overview

The Reputation of Eunuchs in the Ancient World

An ancient **Summari**an myth says that eunuchs "do not satisfy the lap of women," and that they were specifically created to resist the wiles of women. (Source: Inanna's Descent Into the Nether World.)

Sirach 30:20 says, "A eunuch groans when embracing a woman." (Source: Catholic Old Testament.)

Roman playwright **Juvenal** said, "When a soft eunuch takes to matrimony . . . it is hard not to write a satire." (Source: Juvenal and Persius.)

Greek satirist **Lucian**, suggested two ways to determine whether someone was a eunuch: (a) physically inspect their bodies to see if they're physically castrated; or (b) observe whether they are able to perform sexually with females. Lucian compared a eunuch with a woman to a deaf

man with a flute, a bald man with a comb, and a blind man with a mirror. (Sources: Lucian, Eunuchus 12; and Lucian Vol. III.)

The ancient ***Kama Sutra*** has an entire chapter describing how eunuchs seduced men. (Source: Kama Sutra, Part II, Chapter 9).

Ancient historian **Quintus Curtius** wrote that Alexander the Great's palace included "herds of eunuchs, also accustomed to prostitute themselves [like women]." Curtius also reports that Alexander fell deeply in love with a eunuch named Bagoas and they entered into a relationship of deep mutual affection. (Source: Quintus Curtius, History of Alexander, Vol. II.)

In the **Jewish Babylonian Talmud**, which is based on oral tradition going back to and beyond the time of Christ, Rabbi Eliezer contrasts "eunuchs by nature" with "manmade eunuchs" and asserts that "eunuchs by nature" can be "cured" of their condition. (Source: Talmud Bavli, Tractate Yevumos, Chapter 8, 79b.)

Other Rabbis in the **Jewish Babylonian Talmud** identified warning signs so men would know when they were in the presence of a "natural eunuch." (Source: Talmud Bavli, Tractate Yevumos, Chapter 8, 80b.) The warning signs included:

- Lateness of pubic hair.
- Absence of a beard.
- Soft hair.
- Smooth skin.
- A body that does not steam when bathing outdoors in the winter.
- A high voice.
- Failure to pee with enough force to create an arc.