

After the storm: Job 19:23; Luke 20:27-38

by [Michael A. King](#) in the [October 30, 2007](#) issue

When I'm listening to Waylon Jennings and Jessi Colter sing "Storms Never Last," I wonder if I'm also hearing what Job, and even Jesus in Luke 20, would want to sing.

My journey to Waylon and Jessi is circuitous. I grew up in a missionary family that rejected popular music as well as any instruments that thrummed a beat. So I loved George Beverly Shea. Then even Shea turned wild—in the gone-crazy 1960s he recorded with the Blackwood Brothers Quartet and their electric guitars. Soon after that, my parents' resistance to the beat began to wilt, and by the 1970s our large family gave gospel concerts that throbbed with electrified sounds.

But it was only when I was lost in seminary, struggling to find a voice as preacher and writer, that I first experienced solace in "worldly" music. My early 1980s doorway beyond Shea was Waylon Jennings, the "outlaw" country singer bent on making music his way rather than providing the pap music that companies wanted. Then Waylon led me to Jessi, his wife. I fell in love with her images of picking wild flowers, singing Waylon "soft sad songs" and searching for truth amid "storms that brew but pass."

Jessi has comforted me through many a trial. In 2007 Columbia/ Legacy released *Never Say Die* on DVD and CD. It was Waylon's last recorded concert (2000); years of hard living and diabetes would kill him only a few years later. The concert included a miniset by Jessi—and in the middle was "Storms Never Last."

As Jessi crooned to Waylon, and Waylon back to her, they seemed to me to be singing on a stage larger than the one at Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee. No doubt my perception was enhanced by knowing how little time they had yet to share; soon a brokenhearted Jessi would release *Out of the Ashes*, a CD recording her journey through a widow's sorrow. (I once made a pilgrimage to Lee's Ferry, Arizona, where Jessi went to find healing and inspiration after Waylon died.)

Who can say what was happening between them as they sang "Storms Never Last"? I thought I glimpsed these two—Jesse a passionate Christian, laconic Waylon probably one—intuiting that yes, if this earthly stage were all they had, then their days would be sorrowful indeed. They would be cast into that storm that never passes, into death itself, and severed from each other as are we all in the end. But as the tenderness deepened on their faces word by word and glance by glance, I sensed them testing how to love each other not only *in* but *beyond* this world.

I wonder if Job, who knew nothing of Western romantic love or even of the Christian understanding of the resurrection of the dead, might sing a song such as "Storms" about his faith? We can't know precisely how Job felt about rips in his own life and loves. But when I read Job through Waylon and Jessi, I imagine the angst in Job's cry: "O that my words were written down! . . . O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God."

If the helpmeets of our lives can be ripped from us, if flesh of our flesh can be taken before us, well then—give me more! Etch my outcry on stone: I want far more than that! I want something of my own self to be engraved in rock, to endure forever, to be drawn at last before God.

Then how frustrating to encounter those who quibble about details of resurrection, who apparently never glimpsed Jessi and Waylon on that stage beyond this stage (Luke 21), who can do no better than to furrow their brows over whether at the resurrection Tom who was married to Sally before Susan (who was the widow of James) will be married to Susan or Sally.

But I've run myself into that very issue, haven't I? Perhaps the resurrection gives Waylon back to Jessi (though both had prior marriages). But as I hear Luke's Jesus, he's not telling ashes-dwelling Jessi, "Get behind me, woman, with your foolish aching." He's saying to the quibblers: "You don't even *begin* to get this." Everything any of us has ever been, anything any of us has ever loved, anything any Jessi has ever sung to any Waylon, is raised in God, for "he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."

To him all of us are alive. That includes the Jessis and the Waylons we are to each other. It also bursts the bounds of what we can know here. Here we know only how to sing to one Jessi, or one Waylon. That's all we manage before our circuits burn out: a moment of grandeur which is the glory of the Lord made flesh between those who give themselves to each other.

But there with the God of the living, each of us shall be able to be Waylon and Jessi to each other: "But those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection."