

The God of the Living

"But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 22:31-32).

These words were uttered by Jesus in the context of another of the Jewish leaders' attempts to trap the Lord in false teaching. Going back to verse 15 we find the first in this series of snares being set by the Pharisees who, along with the Herodians, asked Jesus about paying taxes to the Roman government. Certainly they were hoping to get the Lord to say that taxes should not be paid so that they could publicly accuse Him of being anti-government or perhaps even an insurrectionist. Jesus did not take the bait though. His answer that there are issues belonging to the spiritual realm and issues belonging to the physical realm thwarted this wave of entrapment.

Having silenced the team of Pharisees and Herodians, Jesus came up next against the Sadducees. Each of the three Gospel writers who recorded this exchange makes special note that the Sadducees denied the resurrection (Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27). This is of great importance due to the fact that Jesus' answer, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living," capably destroyed the Sadducean straw man that they set up in presenting the scenario of a woman who had been widowed seven times and then died herself. "Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her," they asked (Matthew 22:28). Jesus' response was three-fold. First: "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." (verse 29). Second: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." (verse 30). Third: The text cited at the beginning of this article.

Regarding this third response, please notice how Jesus refuted false doctrine with the simple use of a verb tense. Quoting from Exodus 3:6, Jesus recalled how God had told Moses at the burning bush that He was still the God of the three Hebrew fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The last of these, Jacob, had been dead for well over one hundred years, yet Jehovah referred to Himself as the God of these men. He did not say that He WAS their God but that "I AM" their God. The three were dead, were they not? Indeed they were. They were physically dead. So how could God refer to Himself as their God in the present tense? The answer is because these three were spiritually alive. Having been faithful servants of Jehovah, they lived on in eternity, an idea totally foreign to and rejected in the mind of the Sadducees. Jesus' clear and succinct reply to the Sadducean error put them to silence (verse 34) and caused those who witnessed the exchange to be "astonished at his doctrine." (verse 33).

Our God is the God of the living. On a daily basis while we enjoy the breath of life we believe that God exists (Hebrews 11:6), that He is near (Acts 17:27) and that He cares for us (I Peter 5:7). This faith carries us through the challenges of life. But what is on the other side of this life? When we die are we nothing more than useless masses of flesh that encumber the ground beneath the feet of the living? No, we are so much more. We are eternal souls who live on. What's more, if we have been faithful to the Lord to the point of death (Revelation 2:10), we live on with the one true God who Himself lives on. In short, the comfort we gain from God's presence while we walk the earth will transition into the peace we will enjoy on the other side of life in God's eternal presence. God is with us now and will be with us in eternity. We live now in earthly houses that dissolve, but anticipate being with the Lord in "an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (II Corinthians 5:1). Those who die in the Lord will live on in eternity with Him. "Our God is the God of the living. How excellent is His name."

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