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Hear Ye Him #126  
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### The Sermon: THE GOD OF THE LIVING

Scripture: Luke 20:34-38 (Jesus' answer to the Sadducees' question about the woman who had been married to seven brothers in succession.)

And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry and are given in marriage; But they who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world through resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage. Neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto him.

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Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, And the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (Eccl. 12:7)

Death is never very far from any one of us. Most of us have lost some dear friend or loved one in death, and even though death has never struck down one dear to you, you still know in your more solemn moments that some day death will come not only to your loved ones, but to you. We are all concerned therefore, about what lies beyond death.

Shall the dead live again? The faith, the hope, the assurance of all Christians is that they shall. It was to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead that Christ gave his life on the cross and took it up again on the third day to become the first-fruits of them that sleep. Do the dead live now? The answer to that question we believe to be found in the statement of Jesus that God "is not a God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto him."

"All live unto him." When Moses stood in awe before the burning bush, he received the revelation of God -- the Eternal -- and great I AM, who knows no past and no future, but only an eternal present. This God identified himself to Moses in the present tense, not in the past -- "I am the God of thy Father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." All three of these patriarchs had been dead for many years. If they were dead all over -- if they were no longer conscious -- if they were no longer recognizable, distinctive entities, or personalities, then God should have said, "I was -- once upon a time -- the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but now I am the God of Moses." The plain implication of Jesus' statement is that even in death, there is some portion of man that lives -- that all live unto him who is the God of the spirits of all flesh. (Numbers 16:22)

Man as we know him is composed of two parts, body, and spirit. The spirit is the part of man which was formed first in the creation of man which was formed first in the creation of God, which was conscious and able to receive the instruction of God even before the body was created to give it tabernacle, and to furnish it implementation for carrying out its will. The spirit is that part of man which gives life, consciousness, continuity, intelligence, and direction to the body. It is that part of man which gathers the elements of the body, and gives life to them. It is that part of man which remains the same even in the midst of a constantly changing stream of body cells from birth to death.

The duality of man is rather clearly set forth in the account of creation in chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis. Chapter 1, verse 27 reads: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." In succeeding verses God speaks to these newly created personalities, giving them dominion over every living thing on earth, and commanding them to be fruitful and multiply

and replenish the earth. They were conscious; they could hear and understand and respond. But when we read on into the second chapter, we find verse 5 declaring, in spite of his previous creation, that "there was not a man to till the ground." To meet this lack verse 7 says, "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." The first creation was a spiritual creation - a creation of spirit or personality. The second was the forming of a physical body in which the spirit was to live on earth.

We are told in the epistle of James that "the body without the spirit is dead," but there is no statement in scripture that the spirit without the body is dead. The spirit existed before the body was "formed" out of the dust of earth. It survives after the body is dead. Jesus said: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul,....." Separation of the spirit from the body brings death to the body, but not necessarily to the spirit. When death comes, the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the indestructible spirit returns unto God who gave it. Jesus committed his spirit into his Father's hands when he felt death near, and Stephen, the first Christian martyr, cried at the moment of his death, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Another incident in the life of Jesus indicates that God is the God of the living, because even the dead live unto him. On the mount of transfiguration Moses and Elias appeared to Peter, James and John as they waited there with the transfigured Christ. Both Moses and Elias had been dead for centuries, but both appeared in recognizable form and conversed with transfigured Jesus. They were not resurrected beings, for the scriptures plainly state that Christ was the first fruits of them slept. In the eternal spirit world they lived unto God, who is not the God of the dead, but the living.

The scriptures nowhere encourage the living to seek converse with the dead. Nowhere do the scriptures say that the dead have any knowledge of what is now happening on earth. But from several incidents recounted in scripture we may infer that the dead live, that they know each other, that they may speak to each other, and that they have some memory of this life. In Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus, both were conscious; they spoke to each other across a great gulf; and they remembered their life on earth. In the 12th chapter of Second Corinthians Paul tells of a man caught up to paradise where he heard unspeakable words not lawful to utter. Paul indicated a faith that death did not end consciousness or destroy personality when he said that he was willing to be absent from the body, but present with the Lord, and when he wrote to the Philippians: "I am in the strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better; Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."

Another indication of consciousness and life after death is to be found in the third and fourth chapters of I Peter, where Peter says that the gospel was preached to the spirits in prison, who were disobedient in the days of Noah; and "For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead."

In the book of Revelation are other indications that the spirits or souls of the dead are living and conscious in the paradise of God. Revelation 6:9-11 tells of the souls of the martyrs who were beneath the altar, who cried to the Lord, "How long," and who received white robes and the command to rest yet for a little season. This altar, according to Revelation 9:13, is "before God," which agrees with the text that at death the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Those who have died and gone before still live unto God, for he is not the God of the dead but of the living. Under his mercy, justice, and wisdom, they are assigned a place of rest, of peace, of joyful and tireless labor; a place of instruction, and perhaps of correction and punishment. The souls of the departed dead live unto God, waiting the day when through the power of Jesus' resurrection, spirit and body may be restored to each other, and spirit and body, inseparably connected shall be judged and rewarded or punished according to the works done in the flesh by the God who is not the God of the dead, but of the living.