



A FAITH FULLY ALIVE

Luke 20:36-38

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Jesus had some interesting debates with the religious authorities of the day. In this resurrection debate he so thoroughly defeats them that we are told, "They no longer dared ask him any questions." (That would have been fun to watch!) But since the topic of the debate, the resurrection of the dead, is so thoroughly settled in our faith today, the passage at first glance might not seem to have anything to teach us. There is at least one intriguing point here about the next life. "In heaven, they neither marry nor are given in marriage." In a recent Bible study, one young couple told me that this was unimaginable and sad, but another study the wife of a more seasoned couple said, "Thank goodness one lifetime is enough!"

But there is another subtle phrase in this passage that has far more implications than we might think, "*Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living!*"

"A God of the living" has consequences for our understanding of God, the nature of scripture, and our own practice of faith, how we daily experience God!

First, in order to be a God of the living, Godself must be alive as well! A living God does not reside in the pages of a book under our interpretive control but in the world and in our lives.

A Living God

Every few weeks, I practically die of a heart attack in my house. Usually, it's in the nighttime when I sneak to the kitchen for a midnight snack. I grab something from the fridge when a shadow catches the corner of my eye. I pause for a moment when suddenly, a blurry, furry ball of midnight-black lightening leaps across my path. It is our cat, Kidden, K-I-D-D-E-N (blame daughter Liz for the name...) whose beautiful fur allows her to blend into the night. Now, I know she is always actively

prowling at night, but she still makes me jump a mile.

We love dogs because they fit into our lives so very well. But cats are different – you must fit into *their* lives. Cats are such delightfully irksome pets because they cannot be tamed and even when Kidden occasionally nestles up to me for a pet, she still gives me a swipe of her claws to remind me of my place.

A living God cannot be tamed by our theology or doctrine. A living God is out there poking, prodding, and actively prowling about and, at any moment, the Lord can leap into your life, sucking the air from your lungs with amazing delight or demanding your life... and just as with your cats, you never know when it might happen!

One person had this experience with a broken watch. She was sorting through her husband's things after a long, debilitating illness had taken him from her. She came across his old watch. This old watch happened to be stuck on the exact time he had died. She gasped for breath as she remembered. For some, this might have been an impossibly hard reminder, but the Holy Spirit came upon her with such peace, that it became a gift to her of that moment of loss, that exact time, God was with her.

A Living Word

Of course, a living God also means a living Word. Not only does God not reside in a book but neither does God's Word reside in the pages of the book. This one is tricky, but very important. I know it is confusing because we call the Bible the Word of God. But, in fact, that book only comes to life as God's Word to us when it is read dynamically, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we act like those words on the page are carved into eternal ageless stone, we ossify God's Spirit in our hearts which leads to

...condoning slavery,

...condemning all non-Christians to Hell,

...and paving the way for all the worst behaviors humans can imagine.

This has profound implications for the role of Scripture in the practice of faith. Tradition is a critical component of any life of faith. It is necessary in order to cultivate deep patterns of belief. Just like playing the scales on a piano embeds those keys into your hands and soul, so do the traditions of our faith.

As a result, within the pages of scripture God COMMANDS a tremendous number of practices into Israel, the chosen people of God. The Old Testament literally has hundreds of them and perhaps unique in all the world, the Jewish people, though few in number, have survived through some of the greatest horrors in history precisely through the strength of their traditions.

But despite this deep reverence for tradition their reading of scripture is fully alive.

By its very essence, life responds and adapts to its environment, lest it die. Life must grow and, when it stops growing, it starts dying.

The faith is ever growing – like a majestic tree it put down roots long ago that are strong and networked, and everything that grows today depends upon a stout trunk to hold it up, so the branches grow wider and wider.

For the Jews, their strong trunk is made of the Lordship of the One Almighty and Everlasting God, the Passover, the Ten Commandments and the Shema. This core allows even strong branches to fall away, like the temple without losing the whole tree.

For hundreds of generations, their faith included ritual, animal sacrifice and elaborate Temple worship. But today, those are actions long past.

Such a thing would have been unimaginable to them 2000 years ago.

But when the Temple was destroyed in 70AD their faith dramatically changed and adapted, but they didn't lose the core.

The Christian faith grows from the central trunk of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus told us that at the very base of the tree of faith are the two laws: love God and your neighbor as yourself.

From this amazing foundation, literally hundreds of branches, from the Catholics to the Orthodox to the protestants and more, have grown into a glorious behemoth with many gnarled and twisty branches. Thus, even though the Bible does not change, (we do not revise it as we go along) the way in which each age of faith obeys it does. But not according to their own whims, but in reliance on the Holy Spirit.

This means when I read scripture today, I am not only trying to learn, for example, what Paul was telling the Romans, but what God is teaching me, right now! Which leads to our third implication for our key phrase.

My faith, and your faith alive!...

The power of a God fully alive,
discovered through a Word fully alive,
leads to a life as fully
as wondrously alive,
as that moment when God created everything
and declared it was *VERY GOOD*.

The notion of a living God tells us something not just about God, but about our life. We live a life that borrows from the kind of 'life' God has. It is fundamental and at the root of what it means to be alive. Think of the expression to be "fully alive". It means our senses are keener. We experience our breath, our sight, our hearing, and our heart beat with greater intensity and awareness.

So to think of God as The Living God is to first realize our own life is but a shadow of the kind of supercharged life God has in mind for us. We are

living lives in shades of gray when God urges us to know the depth and breadth of color life has to offer.

But before we can embrace this life fully alive, we must be ready to admit the many dead gods we have erected.

Like the shiny, beautiful, golden calf they are alluring, and captivating, and distracting, but also just as lifeless, dead, and powerless.

For many years I worshipped the god, of theological correctness, intellectual prowess, personal competence, and self-righteous judgement. I remember arguing so forcefully in youth group that I made someone cry, but I didn't care because I was right, and I was....

I was right.

I still don't know why I thought it was so important, to prove my point, to prove that I was smarter, and better.

But the god I had erected, was a god of ideas, that could be found in your head, dissected by your mind, and controlled, and called upon when needed. I was worshipping dead branches, that needed to be pruned away.

But over the years, I was too stubborn to learn all at once (I still am learning, just ask Wendy!) the God who actively prowls about like midnight blazing fur, has eroded, and broken down this false faith, and by His power alone, by his love alone has instilled in my heart

the desire, the hunger, the ravenous hunger, to strive for a faith...for a life, that worships the LIVING GOD

and LIVES the greatest, foundation of the faith, the grace, the wondrous cleansing, clinging amazing astounding, grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, The love, the all-encompassing, steadfast, welcoming love of God and the fellowship... the binding, fusing, barrier breaking, fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

That is the faith and life fully alive, when you can know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit more and more, and share it more and more each and every day of this amazing gift of life.