

At least the Sadducees were consistent. They said that there is no resurrection; nothing beyond death, and they lived that way. Modern Christians claim to believe that there is a resurrection, yet do we live in a way that backs that claim? Or do we live as if this side of the grave is all there is?

Our creeds confess the faith, “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” Do our actions and words match? Here’s the painful truth: life which is arranged in such a way that all our goals are to be found on this side of the grave is not a life of faith---it is the life of the Sadducees.

What happens when our highest good becomes scratching items off our “bucket list” before we die? Then death becomes our god, a tyrannical god, a god that keeps us in constant fear even when we're doing well and having fun and going places. The purpose of Jesus' coming and dying on the cross and rising again was to break this curse of death; to set us free from its tyranny.

If Jesus' death on the cross was to deliver us from our lifelong bondage to the fear of death, why is it that, so much of the time, in most of us, that fear of death is still there? Why are we so nervous about getting it all in before the bell rings? Why are we so worried that death is going to come for us before we've accomplished some great thing? Why are we so in the habit of thinking of the dead as really dead and gone and wiped out of existence?

A short walk through Scripture may help set things straight. When Moses met the Lord in a burning bush, that Lord proclaimed: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3:1-6) Notice: He is not the God of three dead men who no longer exist. He is the God of three men who still live in him—the God who rules worlds beyond our comprehension, and who comes and speaks to Moses from the Beyond.

When Elijah and Moses appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration, this was a window on a reality beyond any reality Peter, James and John had ever seen. Hundreds of years have passed since these men were seen on earth, but there they are. Alive. Recognizable.

And the catalogue of people who had faith, in Hebrews 11, is a list of people who looked beyond their graves. “These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13)

Now, we are called to have faith that God answers prayer. We are called to have faith that God will provide, that God heals, that God protects, guides, raises up laborers for the harvest, and redeems the lost. But above all, we are called to have faith that Jesus, the risen, living Lord Jesus, has completely changed what death is. You are called to have a faith that throws off the fear of death and keeps throwing it off by fully embracing the resurrected Lord Jesus.

It's this Jesus who said, "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him."

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still living in God. Our loved ones who have died are still living to God. And the life that we will live to God on the other side of death is not disconnected from this life. That life is the fruit of this life. The thief on the Cross who cried for mercy here received mercy there. Those who are faithful to God here find God faithful there. Those who are faithless here will find themselves denied there. Those who confess Jesus with their lives here will be acknowledged there.

But there's even more. The reality of resurrected life begins driving our decisions when we quit laying up treasure on earth and start laying up treasure in heaven.

Again, our Lord Jesus taught: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matthew 6:19-21

The more our hearts are taken up with God and with Jesus, the less we'll feel any need to hoard things or to make a name for ourselves. What need is there to try to justify ourselves when we can walk through this world with the God of the living ... when the only treasure that survives the grave is God's unstoppable love?

You are called to have a faith that throws off the fear of death and keeps throwing it off by fully embracing the resurrected Lord Jesus. So look at him. Jesus didn't turn away from his cross but went straight for it. He got up from his knees at Gethsemane and went right for his goal. Look to Him and see that instead of aiming away from death and pretending it doesn't exist, you can have burning, complete confidence that on the other side of your final cross, which is death itself, the Father waits; the God of the Living Himself.