

Alive to God¹
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When you think of Jesus, what words come to mind? Do you have certain ways you name him in prayer, or certain titles that you apply to him? The main reason I am a Christian is because of the *peace* I find in following Jesus the best that I can. So, some of my favorite ways to call Jesus are things like “Savior,” and “Prince of Peace,” and sometimes even “brother” and “friend.” These ways of calling Jesus bring me some peace in the midst of all the struggles of daily life.

Yet...when you read through the Bible, our Prince of Peace is very often in the middle of a tussle with someone. Jesus was a fighter! He didn't come to blows ever, but he was undeniably involved in fights between religious views. That was especially true when his ministry led him to Jerusalem and into the waning hours of his earthly life. Which is where we find him today. Our peaceful Savior could mix it up with the best of them. This was part of the Jewish culture from which he came—intellectual argument was considered a sign of spiritual insight, as it remains even today within *our own tradition*. Today's reading finds Jesus throwing down with a group of his fellow Jews known as the Sadducees.

There were a number of ways in which they had different views than Jesus. The most obvious one had to do with the resurrection. The Sadducees said “no way,” whereas Jesus said “oh yeah!” There were reasons that the Sadducees came to their conclusion that there was no afterlife. For one thing, they believed that only Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy were authoritative texts for Jewish religion. And these five books, collectively known as...who knows it? (Right, etc.) These five books never mentioned the idea of life after death. So, the Sadducees decided that the way to achieve immortality was through producing many children, and having your essence carried on by them; which is probably why they posed their trick question about the resurrection to Jesus around a familial concern.

But Jesus was an intellectual fighter, and he was ready for their trap. So, instead of answering them directly, Jesus presents different perspectives which challenge their assumptions. First of all, he declares that the life to come is not like the life we know, so the rules we know simply *do not apply*.

¹ Thanks to —Chris Haslam, <http://montreal.anglican.org/comments/archive/cpr32m.shtml> for some insightful reminders about Jewish thought in Jesus' time.

“Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; 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.”²

OK—so, marriage doesn’t happen in the life to come, things are different because we will be living forever, *and* we will be like angels, not like people. In Christ’s day that meant we would be gender neutral—neither male or female or anything in between—so, in one swift statement, the Sadducees’ question is blown away! What else have you got, Jesus?

This is where he goes on to use *their* knowledge of scripture to *his* advantage. And he goes right to the major authority: Moses himself. Both the Sadducees and Jesus recognized his authority. He says: "And the fact that the dead are raised *Moses himself showed*, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."³

The crux of Christ’s argument is kind of implied. Jesus is saying that Moses addressed God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *in the present tense*. Not that God *was* their God back when they were living, but that God is their God *even now*—so therefore, they are alive *now*. So, in a few quick quips, Jesus brilliantly evades the trap laid by the Sadducees, who quickly retreat, “For they no longer dared to ask him another question.”⁴ However, there is another question that lingers in the text, which is also kind of implied. If God is alive to everyone, whether living or dead—how are *we alive to God now*?

Are we setting traps for the grace Christ offers by making limiting riddles out of faith? That’s how the Sadducees rolled. They had set parameters within which they worked—five books only, and no more, thank you very much! They used their standing assumptions to *limit* grace rather than *to be freed by it*. But Jesus comes to liberate us from our preconceived notions, and those narrow places that reduce what God is. And Jesus comes to invite us into a grace *without* limit. Beyond the borders of dogma, God is waiting to transform us. Beyond the limits of tradition, the living and still-speaking God has a word or two for us. God is alive to each and every one of us—living, dead and indifferent—so we must consider how we can best be *alive to God*. I

² Luke 20:34b-36.

³ Luke 20:37-38.

⁴ Luke 20:40.

encourage each off us to consider the limits and traps we place around God's grace. May we each focus our minds, souls, hearts and whole beings on being alive to God.
Amen.

Luke 20:27-40

²⁷Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him ²⁸and asked him a question, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. ²⁹Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; ³⁰then the second ³¹and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. ³²Finally the woman also died. ³³In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; ³⁵but 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. ³⁶Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. ³⁷And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. ³⁸Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive.”

³⁹Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” ⁴⁰For they no longer dared to ask him another question.