

The God of the Living

by George MacDonald

God is a God of the living, and the resurrection will reveal the true nature of our friends and loved ones, allowing us to recognize and be with them in heaven.

Scripture: Luke 20:38, John 5:28, 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Resurrection"

Description

George MacDonald preaches about the eternal life and God's continuous presence with the living, emphasizing that God is the God of the living, not the dead. He challenges the notion of resurrection of the body, highlighting the importance of the body as a means of revelation and connection to others. MacDonald expresses the belief that the resurrection involves a glorified body that reveals the true essence of each individual, allowing for recognition and deeper connection in the afterlife.

Transcript

He is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.--Luke xx. 38.

It is a recurring cause of perplexity in our Lord's teaching, that he is too simple for us; that while we are questioning with ourselves about the design of Solomon's carving upon some gold-plated door of the temple, he is speaking about the foundations of Mount Zion, yea, of the earth itself, upon which it stands. If the reader of the Gospel supposes that our Lord was here using a verbal argument with the Sadducees, namely, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; therefore they are," he will be astonished that no Sadducee was found with courage enough to reply: "All that God meant was to introduce himself to Moses as the same God who had aided and protected his fathers while they were alive, saying, I am he that was the God of thy fathers. They found me faithful. Thou, therefore, listen to me, and thou too shalt find me faithful unto the death."

But no such reply suggested itself even to the Sadducees of that day, for their eastern nature could see argument beyond logic. Shall God call himself the God of the dead, of those who were alive once, but whom he either could not or would not keep alive? Is that the Godhood, and its relation to those who worship it? The changeless God of an ever-born and ever-perishing torrent of life; of which each atom cries with burning heart, My God! and straightway passes into the Godless cold! "Trust in me, for I took care of your fathers once upon a time, though they are gone now. Worship and obey me, for I will be good to you for threescore years and ten, or thereabouts; and after that, when you are not, and the world goes on all the same without you, I will call myself your God still." God changes not. Once God he is always

God. If he has once said to a man, "I am thy God, and that man has died the death of the Sadducee's creed," then we have a right to say that God is the God of the dead.

"And wherefore should he not be so far the God of the dead, if during the time allotted to them here, he was the faithful God of the living?" What Godlike relation can the ever-living, life-giving, changeless God hold to creatures who partake not of his life, who have death at the very core of their being, are not worth their Maker's keeping alive? To let his creatures die would be to change, to abjure his Godhood, to cease to be that which he had made himself. If they are not worth keeping alive, then his creating is a poor thing, and he is not so great, nor so divine as even the poor thoughts of those his dying creatures have been able to imagine him. But our Lord says, "All live unto him." With Him death is not. Thy life sees our life, O Lord. All of whom all can be said, are present to thee. Thou thinkest about us, eternally more than we think about thee. The little life that burns within the body of this death, glows unquenchable in thy true-seeing eyes. If thou didst forget us for a moment then indeed death would be. But unto thee we live. The beloved pass from our sight, but they pass not from thine. This that we call death, is but a form in the eyes of men. It looks something final, an awful cessation, an utter change. It seems not probable that there is anything beyond. But if God could see us before we were, and make us after his ideal, that we shall have passed from the eyes of our friends can be no argument that he beholds us no longer. "All live unto Him." Let the change be ever so great, ever so imposing; let the unseen life be ever so vague to our conception, it is not against reason to hope that God could see Abraham, after his Isaac had ceased to see him; saw Isaac after Jacob ceased to see him; saw Jacob after some of the Sadducees had begun to doubt whether there ever had been a Jacob at all. He remembers them; that is, he carries them in his mind: he of whom God thinks, lives. He takes to himself the name of Their God. The Living One cannot name himself after the dead; when the very Godhead lies in the giving of life. Therefore they must be alive. If he speaks of them, remembers his own loving thoughts of them, would he not have kept them alive if he could; and if he could not, how could he create them? Can it be an easier thing to call into life than to keep alive?

"But if they live to God, they are aware of God. And if they are aware of God, they are conscious of their own being: Whence then the necessity of a resurrection?"

For their relation to others of God's children in mutual revelation; and for fresh revelation of God to all.--But let us inquire what is meant by the resurrection of the body. "With what body do they come?"

Surely we are not required to believe that the same body is raised again. That is against science, common sense, Scripture. St Paul represents the matter quite otherwise. One feels ashamed of arguing such a puerile point. Who could wish his material body which has indeed died over and over again since he was born, never remaining for one hour composed of the same matter, its endless activity depending upon its endless change, to be fixed as his changeless possession, such as it may then be, at the moment of death, and secured to him in worthless identity for the ages to come? A man's material body will be to his consciousness at death no more than the old garment he throws aside at night, intending to put on a new and a better in the morning. To desire to keep the old body seems to me to argue a degree of sensual materialism excusable only in those pagans who in their Elysian fields could hope to possess only such a thin, fleeting, dreamy, and altogether funebrial existence, that they might well long for the thicker, more tangible bodily being in which they had experienced the pleasures of a tumultuous life on the upper world. As well might a Christian desire that the hair which has been shorn from him through all his past life should be restored to his risen and glorified head.

Yet not the less is the doctrine of the Resurrection gladdening as the sound of the silver trumpet of its visions, needful as the very breath of life to our longing souls. Let us know what it means, and we shall see that it is thus precious.

Let us first ask what is the use of this body of ours. It is the means of Revelation to us, the camera in which God's eternal shows are set forth. It is by the body that we come into contact with Nature, with our fellow-men, with all their revelations of God to us. It is through the body that we receive all the lessons of passion, of suffering, of love, of beauty, of science. It is through the body that we are both trained outwards from ourselves, and driven inwards into our deepest selves to find God. There is glory and might in this vital evanescence, this slow glacier-like flow of clothing and revealing matter, this ever uptossed rainbow of tangible humanity. It is no less of God's making than the spirit that is clothed therein.

We cannot yet have learned all that we are meant to learn through the body. How much of the teaching even of this world can the most diligent and most favoured man have exhausted before he is called to leave it! Is all that remains to be lost? Who that has loved this earth can but believe that the spiritual body of which St Paul speaks will be a yet higher channel of such revelation? The meek who have found that their Lord spake true, and have indeed inherited the earth, who have seen that all matter is radiant of spiritual meaning, who would not cast a sigh after the loss of mere animal pleasure, would, I think, be the least willing to be without a body, to be unclothed without being again clothed upon. Who, after centuries of glory in heaven, would not rejoice to behold once more that patient-headed child of winter and spring, the meek snowdrop? In whom, amidst the golden choirs, would not the vision of an old sunset wake such a song as the ancient dwellers of the earth would with gently flattened palm hush their throbbing harps to hear?

All this revelation, however, would render only a body necessary, not this body. The fulness of the word Resurrection would be ill met if this were all. We need not only a body to convey revelation to us, but a body to reveal us to others. The thoughts, feelings, imaginations which arise in us, must have their garments of revelation whereby shall be made manifest the unseen world within us to our brothers and sisters around us; else is each left in human loneliness. Now, if this be one of the uses my body served on earth before, the new body must be like the old. Nay, it must be the same body, glorified as we are glorified, with all that was distinctive of each from his fellows more visible than ever before. The accidental, the nonessential, the unrevealing, the incomplete will have vanished. That which made the body what it was in the eyes of those who loved us will be tenfold there. Will not this be the resurrection of the body? of the same body though not of the same dead matter? Every eye shall see the beloved, every heart will cry, "My own again!--more mine because more himself than ever I beheld him!" For do we not say on earth, "He is not himself to-day," or "She looks her own self;" "She is more like herself than I have seen her for long"? And is not this when the heart is glad and the face is radiant? For we carry a better likeness of our friends in our hearts than their countenances, save at precious seasons, manifest to us.

Who will dare to call anything less than this a resurrection? Oh, how the letter killeth! There are who can believe that the dirt of their bodies will rise the same as it went down to the friendly grave, who yet doubt if they will know their friends when they rise again. And they call that believing in the resurrection!

What! shall a man love his neighbour as himself, and must he be content not to know him in heaven? Better be content to lose our consciousness, and know ourselves no longer. What! shall God be the God of the families of the earth, and shall the love that he has thus created towards father and mother, brother and sister, wife and child, go moaning and longing to all eternity; or worse, far worse, die out of our

bosoms? Shall God be God, and shall this be the end?

Ah, my friends! what will resurrection or life be to me, how shall I continue to love God as I have learned to love him through you, if I find he cares so little for this human heart of mine, as to take from me the gracious visitings of your faces and forms? True, I might have a gaze at Jesus, now and then; but he would not be so good as I had thought him. And how should I see him if I could not see you? God will not take you, has not taken you from me to bury you out of my sight in the abyss of his own unfathomable being, where I cannot follow and find you, myself lost in the same awful gulf. No, our God is an unveiling, a revealing God. He will raise you from the dead, that I may behold you; that that which vanished from the earth may again stand forth, looking out of the same eyes of eternal love and truth, holding out the same mighty hand of brotherhood, the same delicate and gentle, yet strong hand of sisterhood, to me, this me that knew you and loved you in the days gone by. I shall not care that the matter of the forms I loved a thousand years ago has returned to mingle with the sacred goings on of God's science, upon that far-off world wheeling its nursery of growing loves and wisdoms through space; I shall not care that the muscle which now sends the ichor through your veins is not formed of the very particles which once sent the blood to the pondering brain, the flashing eye, or the nervous right arm; I shall not care, I say, so long as it is yourselves that are before me, beloved; so long as through these forms I know that I look on my own, on my loving souls of the ancient time; so long as my spirits have got garments of revealing after their own old lovely fashion, garments to reveal themselves to me. The new shall then be dear as the old, and for the same reason, that it reveals the old love. And in the changes which, thank God, must take place when the mortal puts on immortality, shall we not feel that the nobler our friends are, the more they are themselves; that the more the idea of each is carried out in the perfection of beauty, the more like they are to what we thought them in our most exalted moods, to that which we saw in them in the rarest moments of profoundest communion, to that which we beheld through the veil of all their imperfections when we loved them the truest?

Lord, evermore give us this Resurrection, like thine own in the body of thy Transfiguration. Let us see and hear, and know, and be seen, and heard, and known, as thou seest, hearest, and knowest. Give us glorified bodies through which to reveal the glorified thoughts which shall then inhabit us, when not only shalt thou reveal God, but each of us shall reveal thee.

And for this, Lord Jesus, come thou, the child, the obedient God, that we may be one with thee, and with every man and woman whom thou hast made, in the Father.

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