

# Alive to God

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Date: 01 December 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you'll all just take a quick look in your bulletin, the sermon title is Revival and Anti-Revival. Forget that. We're not doing that tonight.

But we are gonna look at Psalm 135 verses 15 to 18. It's just this little four verse section and we're gonna talk about what it is to be alive to God.

So let me ask you, what is your life's center of gravity? And you all have one. We all have a center of gravity, something that pulls everything in our life into orbit around it.

Some years back, David Foster Wallace, who's a very non-Christian American author, before he died very tragically, he said this in a speech that's very clear-minded.

It's worth reading. Quote, In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshiping. Everybody worships.

[ 1 : 04 ] The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of God or spiritual type thing to worship is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive.

Then he goes on to give some examples. And this is what it looks like when our lives center around something other than God. He says, If you worship money and things, if they're where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough.

Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.

Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid. And you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship intellect being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out.

But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is that they're unconscious. They are default settings. The Bible agrees. And because God loves us with all of his heart, he wants to be our center of gravity.

[ 2 : 10 ] He wants to be the object of our worship. Because we were created by God to orbit around him, to trust in him. And so we're only going to feel really alive when we orbit around God.

And when our hearts are set on him. So whatever our hearts are in orbit around is the thing that we worship. So we're going to look at worshiping false gods tonight as a sort of a foil, which will help us more deeply understand what it is to worship God and to understand his heart for us.

So I just have three points and a question. The three points, number one, everyone worships.

Number two, you are what you eat. And number three, the end or the goal of worship.

So let's dive in. Look at Psalm 135 verse 15. We'll start there. Everyone worships. How do I know everyone worships? Because of two little words in verse 15, the nations.

The Bible has, when it talks about people spiritually, it talks about two categories, God's people and not God's people.

[ 3 : 23 ] And in the Old Testament we see that as Israel and the nations. And so when it talks about the nations here, it's talking about everyone who doesn't trust in God.

And we find that the Bible actually has no category for a non-worshiper. Because the idols of the nations just assumes that the nations have idols.

So like David Foster Wallace said in that quote, there's, in a sense, no such thing as an atheist. Everybody worships something. And we end up worshiping kind of what the gaze of our heart is pointed at.

Like your heart has this big unblinking eye that can just be directed at something all the time. And whatever we direct the gaze of our heart at becomes the center of our gravity.

So idolatry is just worshiping the wrong thing. Idolatry is trusting anything other than God as the thing that we need to feel really alive.

[ 4 : 26 ] It's the thing that kind of gives us our okness. In Colossians 3-5, Paul actually says something interesting. He says that covetousness is idolatry.

What a fascinating way to put that. So idolatry may be more than covetousness, but it's certainly not less. Because when we're covetous, we want more and more.

What we have isn't enough. So that's what idolatry is, right? It's saying to God, you're not enough. I actually need something in addition to you or something apart from you to feel ok, to feel alive.

I'm going to need something else, something more. So we actually begin down that road of turning from God and rejecting God because of that intercovetousness to want more and more.

But anything else you set your heart on will eat you alive. So this Psalm and the rest of the Bible assumes this kind of binary nature of humanity.

[ 5 : 27 ] The God worshipers and the worshipers who don't worship God. And some of us might be offended by that. It goes against the grain of pretty much everything that our world is telling us today.

That God demands our exclusive worship. It means that we can't have an attitude of moral or spiritual relativism. We aren't each morally free to worship whatever we like.

That can be a very offensive claim today, but it's true. But here's the good news in it. God loves us too much to let us worship whatever we want. He loves us too much to let us drink the poison of idolatry.

In fact, God demands our absolute everything so that in Christ, he can give us his everything. That is incredibly good news.

So everyone worships. Verse 16 and 17 is the middle of our portion here. It says, the idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands.

[ 6 : 38 ] They have, that's 15, sorry, 16. They have mouths that do not speak, they have eyes that do not see, they have ears that do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths.

So by setting up false gods as kind of a foil, we can see more clearly what God is like. These false gods, which is again anything but God that we put our trust in, that we rely on and need in that sense, they are completely impotent to save.

That's the point. They have all these features that are used for good things, mouths and eyes and ears, but they can't do anything. They're useless.

So they have mouths, these false gods have mouths but do not speak, but our God is the God who spoke the universe into existence. Our God is the God who revealed himself through his word so that we can know him and love him.

And I'm so glad he did that. Our God is the God who sent his word to become a human, Jesus, and that he might speak the word justified to our hearts so that we could be reconciled to God.

[ 7 : 51 ] So God speaks. We need a God who speaks. But these false gods, they have eyes but do not see.

And seeing, it's actually used quite like we use it today, to actually see something, but also to understand something, like when you say, oh, I see.

Right, it's saying, I get it, I understand, right? So our God sees. He has eyes to see the oppression and suffering of his people so that he can act with compassion and sympathy and empathy because he sees, he understands.

In Exodus 225, God's people, I've been languishing in slavery for hundreds of years, oppressed, beaten down, suffering.

And I love this verse. It's so simple. It's so short. It just says, God saw the people of Israel and God knew. We have a God who sees and knows the oppression of the lowly and the suffering of his people.

[ 8 : 57 ] So we need a God who sees. These false gods have ears but do not hear. But our God hears the cry of the oppressed. For instance, the innocent blood of Abel crying from the ground for justice after he was murdered by Cain in Genesis 4.

He even hears and has compassion on these seemingly insignificant moments of injustice in our lives and the pain and the frustration. So Exodus 22, 26 and 27 says, If ever you take your neighbor's cloak and pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down.

For that is his only covering and it is his cloak for his body. And what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

Isn't that amazing? He's saying, if you take the cloak of your neighbor and he's cold and he cries out to me, I'll hear him, I'm a compassionate God.

So from the big oppressions to the little injustices and unfairnesses of life, our God hears and we need that.

[10:07] Now the last line here, nor is there any breath in their mouths in verse 17, that just means they're dead. They have a mouth, there's no air in it.

Our God is the living God. In fact, the phrase living God, the living God as a title for God, occurs 28 different times in the Bible. It's a big deal that he's the living God and it's always set in opposition to anything else.

Because John 5.56 says that God has life in himself. He's the only thing that has life in himself.

We're all derivative people. We don't have life in and of ourselves.

We require parents to give us life. We require food and sustenance and all these things to keep us going and eventually we wear out. God has life in and of himself and he needs none of that.

He's completely dependent. He's the great I am. He is the existent one. But that's really good news because that God is also the God who shares his life with us.

[11:16] He loves to do that. John 6.63 says the Spirit gives life. God the Holy Spirit gives life. The flesh is no help at all.

So God the Holy Spirit is the only thing that can give us real life. Everything else inside of us, the flesh, the thing that's oriented to want everything in the world and to make our lives about everything but God.

The flesh is no help at all. So if you want to feel alive, if you want to truly live everything in you that wants everything but God, even good things that become ultimate things, family, money, all these can be good things.

But the flesh is no help at all. We need the God who has life in and of himself to give us that life as well.

So point number two, you are what you eat. The original title was we become like what we worship but it was too clunky. You are what you eat. Now I know you all probably woke up this morning thinking, man, I wonder where the phrase you are what you eat came from.

[12:34] Well, I've done the heavy lifting for you. 1826, a man named Jean-Anthelme Brillet-Savarin, and I probably mispronounced that. He was a French lawyer who became kind of a gastrointestinal expert.

He wrote, tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are. And that seems to be kind of the origination of that phrase. But it's a really interesting phrase.

We all kind of can experientially attest to its truthfulness. Not that we literally are a baked potato because that's what we had for supper, but what we put into our bodies through our mouths deeply shapes and impacts the whole person.

The way that you feel the clarity of your thinking, your long-term health is all shaped by what you eat. Worship is like that.

We really do become like what we worship. Look at verse 18, those who make them become like them, and so do all who trust in them.

[13:39] So idolatry is like poison. It will kill you. In fact, the language is interesting. It's kind of an ongoing thing. It's like a degradation into being more and more dead.

But directing the gaze of your heart toward Jesus, worshipping God is like eating real food for the first time. And he makes us come alive.

So what is the, what's the point? What is the goal or the end of this kind of worship? Well, it's conformity to the likeness of the thing we love.

If we love God, it's to be fully alive to him, to the living one, to the living God, the I am. It's coming alive and partaking of his fullness and richness of life.

That's the goal of this worship. It's to have God himself. Question 48 of the New City Catechism that we looked at tonight said, God chooses and preserves for himself a community elected for purpose statement, eternal life.

[14:55] And as Thomas mentioned so helpfully last week, I think that was last week, eternal life isn't something that starts later. If you trust Jesus, it starts now. It's both a quantity and a quality of

life.

It's real life. Or John 3.16, we all know it, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

It's the point. So if you have done that, if you have trusted in Christ, what does this say to you?

I know that you don't have, you know, little stone idols in your house that you're worshipping. So is this relevant to you? In other words, can a Christian also be an idolater?

It's an important question. The story of the church is that we're constantly being disciplined by the Lord throughout history because we're acting like the nations. So this song, this section of the song is talking about the nations, right?

[15:57] The nations have these idols of silver and gold, the work of human hands. But our history, for thousands of years, as the people of God, is that we're constantly becoming like them being conformed to the world around us and their gods rather than God.

And so he disciplines us lovingly. He gives us his word. He draws us to himself. He moves us to himself. Because yes, we can start to look like those nations who worship false gods.

In fact, when someone asks Jesus, what's the greatest commandment? And he said, I'll do you one better. I'll give you the greatest and the second greatest commandment. The first is to love God and the second is to love your neighbor.

What if he'd flipped those? The first is first so that neighbor love doesn't become our false God in which we find all of our hope and our sense of self-worth.

If loving God doesn't come first, then everything else, even the good things like loving our neighbor as ourselves, even the good things will become ultimate things and become false gods to us.

[17:02] Psalm 85 has this wonderful little phrase where the psalmist says, will you not revive us again?

That your people may rejoice in you. What an important again. We are people in constant need of revival. We need God to make our hearts alive to him.

The gospel is for daily use. It's not one and done salvation. It's not I made a decision 10 years ago and now I'm good. The gospel is bread to eat every day.

We need daily refreshment and renewal in the Lord because our hearts, as John Calvin famously said, are idle factories. What he means, in fact, he was, I think he said that in relation to Psalm 115, which has almost word for word, the same section.

His point is that our hearts are such after the fall that we want everything that is nice in this world that we like. We want to turn it into the center of our gravity.

[18:06] We're good at it. In fact, you might have had one idol in your life that the Lord really helped you get rid of maybe some years back.

He really showed you, you're really idolizing money and you're only going to feel okay if you have money in the savings account. Maybe you gave that to Lord and you repented, but I bet you your hearts found another.

Mine does. That's just our orientation to the world. So we need this constant daily revival from the Lord.

Renewal of refreshment. But what if I've sunk too low? What if I'm so far down the hole of idolatry that I just kind of feel dead to everything?

What if it's too embarrassing to get out? What now? For every drop of deadness in our hearts, there's an ocean of grace and love in God's for you.

[19:09] This is the God who says, come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, I will give you rest. This is the God who says, I came that you might have life and have it abundantly.

He died for you so you can be alive to him. That's how much he loves us. And it grows from the dead that we know that the corners of little worldliness and deadness in our hearts won't hold a candle to the God who conquered death itself.

We can take it to him. And he's most tender to us where we're most needy.

Lastly, the last little line in verse 18, so do all who trust in them. Because really, worship doesn't demand performance and duty as much as it just demands our reliance and trust.

So God isn't yelling at us to shape up. He just wants your heart. He's inviting us to let go of those flimsy structures we've built to support us in our lives and just throw our weight on Jesus.

[20:19] So what if we all ask tonight? What if we all ask the Lord to help us let go of our puny little false gods and turn to him more fully than ever? What if we let him make us alive to God and it

might hurt?

Shifting the center of our gravity can be a painful thing because sometimes our hands are wrapped around our idols like we have rigomortis. And it's painful to pry those fingers off of the things we think we need.

But it's worth it. If the Lord has pricked your heart tonight to show you that you're trusting in something other than him for your life, for your okanus, that's actually the first sign of inward renewal.

That's the first spark of the fire. So go to him with it. And he will give you grace upon grace. Pray with me.

Father, we are in awe of your heart toward us tonight. And it is so good to be here. Pleasant to sing your praises with your people.

[ 21 : 34 ] Lord, we thank you for Christ. We thank you for showing us your priorities and showing us how you feel about us, really. That your heart is for us.

Lord, we would never believe it if we didn't see the cross. I pray that you will renew and refresh and revive us all tonight, Lord. Maybe some of us for the first time.

It's a work only you can do and we just throw ourselves on you for it. The name of Christ and for his glory. Amen.

Thank you, John. We're going to close singing to the Psalm that John mentioned, the great words of Psalm 85. The Psalm that just speaks of God's amazing power and his faithfulness and the fact that he can bring us alive again.

In times past, Lord, you should favour to your own beloved land the prosperity of Jacob you restored by your strong hand. We're going to sing the whole Psalm. Let's stand and sing together.

[ 22 : 48 ] In times past, Lord, you should favour to your own beloved land the prosperity of Jacob you restored by your strong hand.

You forgave your people's trespass. You were pleased with sins to hide.

You withdrew all your displeasure from your wrath. You turned us up.

God our Saviour now restore us from mostern away your rage.

Will your anger burn against us? Will it last from age to age? Will you not again revive us?

[ 24 : 09 ] There we may rejoin in you. Show us, Lord, your calm and mercy, your salvation granted you.

I will hear what God the Lord says to his saints. He offers peace.

But if people must not wonder and return to foolishness, surely for all those who fear him, his salvation is at hand so that once again his glory may be seen within our land.

Love and truth have met together, righteousness and peace and grace.

Righteousness looks down from heaven, from the earth, springs faithfulness. What is good the Lord will give us and all on its fruitful man, righteousness will go before him and his royal way prepared.

[ 26 : 15 ] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all and all God's people say amen.

Just a couple of notices as we close. As usual there's tea and coffee served at the table at the back so please do stay behind. We'd be delighted to have the opportunity to see you. As Derek mentioned in the morning, our annual cattle service is in two weeks time.

There's cards at the back on the table. Please do take one of these or take a few of these if you have people that you would like to give an invitation to. Also over the coming week the notice will be shared through our social media channels so if you're able to share that as well through your own pages that will be fantastic.

It's a great opportunity to invite people who otherwise don't normally come to church but yet often are keen to come for a cattle service. So please remember that, invite people and also be praying for it over the next couple of weeks as it is a wonderful gospel opportunity and we hope and pray that God will be at work in the midst of that.

So if you could remember that we would appreciate it very much indeed. Otherwise have a good week and may God be with you. Thank you.