

The “In Spite Of” Life

“I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

“Abundant life” refers to an overflowing, overcoming, overwhelming life—a life that satisfies, saturates, and soothes, a life that preserves, perpetuates, and prepares. Actually, this sentence in the original Greek text reads, “I am come that they might keep on having abundant life.” The Bible says, “In Him was life, . . .” (John 1:4); “He who has the Son has the life; . . .” (1 John 5:12).

One does not really have to travel very far to find people who do not have the abundant life. In fact, we might not even have to leave the worship assembly to find some. Some people have *abundance (of things) in life* who have never dreamed of having the *abundant life*.

J. Paul Getty was apparently, at one time, the world’s richest man. He died in 1976. His biographer wrote an article about him in which he said that Getty’s mansion was surrounded by vicious dogs, all five hundred windows were barred, his bedroom door was embedded in steel, and a guard with an attack dog stood by his bedroom window every night. Mr. Getty was married five times, and all of these marriages ended in divorce. He had five sons by four of

his wives. He was close to none of his sons. When his son Tim died of a brain tumor, Mr. Getty did not even attend the funeral. Another son, George, committed suicide. Another, Paul, Jr., was disinherited for the use of drugs, after which his father never saw him again. When one of his grandchildren was kidnapped, Getty suspected that the boy was simply trying to extort funds from him. Consequently, he refused to pay the ransom until the kidnappers cut off one of the boy’s ears and mailed it to the police. The biographer concluded that the world’s richest man never felt rich. He was afraid everyone was after his money. Thus, he was stingier with his love than he was with his money.

While that is one extreme, it does remind us that the world is full of people who never have an inkling of what our Lord meant when He said, “I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.”

It is even possible to be a regular churchgoer, to be a frequent guest in an assembly where God is worshiped, and not to have abundant life. Would you believe that churches and religious individuals exist to whom love is almost a stranger, and joy and peace are unknown?

Near a place where I have

preached, meets a little church that is going through a difficult time. For whatever cause (probably it is not a matter of doctrine as much as personalities) at a recent worship service a man stood up and slapped the face of another man. When everyone got outside the building, a woman slapped the face of another woman. I doubt that anyone in that community believes that very much abundant life abounds right now in that church.

I would not want to read into John 10:10 something our Lord did not place in it by leaving the impression that when you come to Christ you will no longer experience any hurt or pain. Obviously, pain and heartache are part of the predicament of life. When we were born, we had to accept the suffering that would come with it. We are promised that somehow the Christian, while he cannot live a trouble-free life, can have an abundant life. We can have the toughness of character and the spiritual strength to face whatever life brings to us.

In Spite Of Calamity

In Romans 8, Paul mentioned hardships which had come or would come to the people to whom he was writing—tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword (v. 35). These people were just like us. In the midst of his description, Paul asked, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” He then announced this conclusion: “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” (vv. 37-39). Paul affirmed that we are more than conquerors. The New English Bible says: “Overwhelming victory is ours through Him who loved us.” No matter how you read it, it is the same. “Through Christ,” Paul said, “we have overwhelming victory. We are more than conquerors.”

In Spite Of Conflicts

Paul asked three questions in Romans 8. First, he asked, “If God is for us, who is against us?” (v. 31). Many answers could be given to that question. The world can be against us, pagan people can be against us, and even our own family can be against us; but to those who

are more than conquerors, it really does not matter.

In Spite Of Criticism

He asked a second question: “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?” (v. 33). The answer to that question is that there may be any number of people. All over this world one could find people who are laying a charge against God’s elect. But Paul answers, “In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” (v. 37).

In Spite Of Circumstances

The third question he asked is this: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (v. 35). He mentions several possibilities: “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (v. 35). Then he answered, “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” (v. 37).

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The chapter comes to a grand conclusion. If you had to pick out two verses to have read for you when you are dying, I do not know where you would find two better ones than the last two verses in Romans 8:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (vv. 38, 39).

Whether tomorrow finds you in the dust of death or in the bustle of life, you will not be separated from the love of God. Paul said, “things present” and “things to come” cannot separate us. None of the spine-chilling forebodings in the forecast concerning tomorrow,

no matter if they do come to pass, can separate you from the love of God. Paul said, "Nor height, nor depth." If a meteor should hit the earth, as apparently they have in centuries past, that would not separate us from the love of God. If a fissure should appear deep in the ground and the grinding plates of the earth should come together, as they will some day, that will not separate us from the love of God.

Paul even went so far as to say, "Nor any other created thing." It has been over twenty years since man landed on the moon. What a momentous event that was! Some day we hope to land on Mars, and then we hope to go beyond Mars. Who knows what the future holds? If some other creatures in the universe were found (although we doubt such will ever occur), we can just think of Paul's words, "Nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God." We are more than conquerors. Actually, the Greek word Paul used is the word *huper* from which we get our word "hyper." We are *huper* conquerors; we are hyper conquerors, more than conquerors.

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Will you live a trouble-free life? Of course not. Will moments come when sorrows like sea billows will roll over you? Yes, they will almost crush you. But you will be more than a conqueror through Christ.

A lady came into the church assembly one night in Winchester, sat down beside Judy, and talked very pleasantly. She smiled, sang, bowed her head when we prayed, and listened attentively to the sermon. My wife did not know until after the service was over that that dear Christian woman had buried her husband that afternoon. She and her husband

had made a pact between them that nothing in life or death would separate them from the love of God. He had to go on to Paradise and would wait for her there, and she would continue in the service of Christ here without missing a step. She was keeping her part of the agreement.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? The key to the answer is to keep one's self in the love of Christ, to be faithful in the work of the Lord. Notice, Paul said, "We overwhelmingly conquer through Him [Jesus Christ] who loved us." Romans 8 begins with the words, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (v. 1). The chapter closes with the affirmation that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 39). What an encouraging chapter of Scripture—it opens and closes with the victory that is ours.

The only place the abundant life is found is in Jesus. If you thought you could find it by flying the friendly skies of United Airlines, if you thought you could find it by traveling, by spending or building, you are mistaken. It is only found in Christ Jesus.

I have an insatiable curiosity. If I have the opportunity, wherever I go I want to see what is there. On a trip to Lynchburg, Tennessee, we could not resist listening to people talk about the Jack Daniel's whiskey distillery, the oldest distillery in America. We were told that so much whiskey was stored (being aged) on that property in Lynchburg that if you sold it all today at Tennessee prices, you would sell over three billion dollars worth of whiskey right on that spot—three billion dollars. I thought about how many broken bones, broken hearts, broken homes, and broken dreams were sitting in those aging barrels.

Jack Daniels himself never married. When he was sixteen years old, he opened a distillery. He found a cave with special water in it, and devoted the rest of his life to making Tennessee whiskey. He had little control over himself. One morning he went into the distillery. When he could not get the safe open, he became angry and did what any carnal man would do. He kicked the safe. The fact is, he

broke his toe, gangrene set in, he lost his left leg, and, ultimately, he died from having kicked the safe. Unfortunately, he is probably the best known Tennessean in history.

Think of the people in the world who live for themselves, who spend their days doing nothing worthwhile. When they come to the end of their lives, they have nothing to show for their years spent here.

One day I went searching for the home of David Lipscomb. He was born on January 21, 1831, just outside of Winchester, Tennessee. The old house that brother Lipscomb was born in (built in 1830) is still standing. While he is not buried in the old cemetery, some other members of his family are. We went around looking at the old church, the old cemetery, and the old house nearby that were a part of the life of brother Lipscomb.

Something is very sad about an old cemetery. It reminds us that we all die and become anonymous. The time was in those old cemeteries when people followed in a line, buried their loved one, put up a monument, and said, "We want our loved one to be remembered forever." The winds came and the rains fell. The weather did its part. Soon the stone was broken, the writing became almost illegible, a crack developed in the monument, a plant grew up in the crack, and the stone broke apart. After two or three hundred years, everyone becomes virtually anonymous.

Many anonymous people even appear in the Bible. Who was the dying thief? We do not know his name (Luke 23:42). Who was the soldier who said, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39)? We do not know. Who were the women who on the night of the crucifixion followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the burial of Christ (Luke 23:55)? We do not know all of their names. Who were the seventy disciples? Jesus called to Him seventy men, and told them to go preach to the lost sheep of Israel (Luke 10:1), but who were they? Sooner or later, all of us become anonymous.

But there is a difference for the Christian. If you have lived an abundant life, to use the

words of Paul, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38, 39).

Conclusion

The question that we need to ask ourselves is this: "Am I in Christ?" "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places *in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3; emphasis mine). If everything that will amount to anything three hundred years after my death is in Christ, it is very significant for me to ask, "Am I in Christ?"

If I am not in Christ, how do I get into Christ? The Bible answers in Galatians 3:27, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ," and in Romans 6:3, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?"

A believer who truly loves the Lord and wishes to give Him his life, a believer who is penitent and regretful about his sin and anxious to have God's help in the future, should be baptized into Christ. If you are old enough to be lost, you are old enough to be saved by the blood of Christ. Are you saying in your heart, "I do want to be a Christian. I do not want my life to end up as nothing. I do not want to go into eternity having nothing behind me and nothing before me, but I want to be more than a conqueror"? To retranslate the words of Paul, "I want to be a hyper conqueror through Jesus Christ."

Jesus said, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." It is not just something we talk about. It is an actual reality. Christian people scattered all over this world would not trade one day of the abundant life for all the riches of a billionaire such as J. Paul Getty. The abundant life can be yours if you will take it.