

Anyone Can Have The Abundant Life (1)

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

Jesus did not come to bring religion; He came to bring *life*. The word “religion” is found only five times in the New Testament, but the word “life” is found 186 times. “I came,” He said, “that they might have life.” Many have religion but do not have abundant life. The Jews were looking for a new world; Jesus said, “I have a new life.” The Greeks hid themselves in book learning; Jesus came to say, “I have a book of life.”

Of the twenty-seven New Testament books, the Gospel of John is about life. The Greek word is *zoe*. That word is found fifty times in the Gospel of John. Almost at the beginning of the book are the words, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). Almost at the end of the book are the words: “These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). I wonder if there is a single page in the book of John where the word “life” is not used. Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35); “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6); “The words that I have spoken to you

are spirit and are life” (John 6:63).

John assures us in his Gospel that this life comes not just by desire, but by decision (John 1:13). He will give those who wish to receive it the power to become. But each one of us must choose. I want to look at four people in chapters 3, 4, 5, and 9 of John who had this abundant life offered to them: Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, a crippled man, and a blind man.

John 3: Nicodemus

Nicodemus was a most impressive man. In the New Testament, other than the apostles, there is probably no more impressive man than Nicodemus.

“Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews” (v. 1). He came to Jesus by night. He was clever. He was qualified. He was a man of credentials. His being a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin reminds us that he was middle-aged. He was a nice looking person because even that was a requirement. His being a member of the Sanhedrin tells us that he spoke a number of different foreign languages. He had to be learned in the law, religion, math, astronomy, and medicine. The most well-rounded people were members of the Sanhedrin.

He came to Jesus that night,

saying, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (v. 2). You might think that Jesus would have responded with a word of appreciation, but He immediately went to the heart of the matter and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v. 3).

Our Lord's reply surprised this brilliant man, and Nicodemus responded, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (v. 4). Jesus simply said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again' " (vv. 6, 7).

What the Lord told this man was wonderful. Three times the Lord told Nicodemus, "You must be born again." If you and I are to have the abundant life, we must be born of the "water and the Spirit" (v. 5). What do you imagine the words "water and the Spirit" mean?

Hardly anyone questioned that it refers, in part, to the act of baptism until recent centuries. It is the testimony of almost all of the early church leaders that to be "born of water" referred to baptism. Augustine, Origen, John Chrysostom, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus believed that way. In fact, with the exception of only a voice here and there, practically the whole testimony of the first one thousand years of church history is that it is a reference to baptism. Even Martin Luther said, "Here Christ is speaking of baptism, of real and natural water, such as a cow may drink." Modern commentators, however, want the water to represent anything and everything except water.

How did the apostles understand the new birth? Surely, on the Day of Pentecost, these people being baptized were born again. They entered the kingdom, and John said in chapter 3 that the new birth puts a person in the kingdom. When the Jews heard the gospel, they said, "What shall we do?" The answer was, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the

forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Two conditions are involved once a person gives his life to the Lord in faith. He must repent of his sins and then be baptized in water. He then receives, said Peter, "the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Jesus also told Nicodemus: "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (v. 8). Can anyone explain the wind? Of course not. Does anyone absolutely and positively know where the wind comes from? No. But we can know when the wind blows by feeling the effect of it. Jesus told Nicodemus that he would never fathom the new birth. No one would ever be able to satisfactorily explain it; but like the wind, the voice of the Holy Spirit can be heard and the effect of the new birth can be seen.

I wish I could tell you what happened to Nicodemus. In John 7 we meet him again. This time he is courageously defending Christ before the Sanhedrin. In John 19 we meet him a third time. When the body of Jesus has been crucified and taken down from the wooden stake, two men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, take the body. They very carefully anoint the body, wrap it with linen cloth, and bury it. We do not hear of Nicodemus beyond this event.

I would guess that on the Day of Pentecost when 120 people gathered in the upper room, Nicodemus was present with the 119 others. Nicodemus was offered a new life. The way you can have it, said the Lord, is to be born again. Apparently, it was to Nicodemus that Jesus spoke these beautiful words, the golden text of the Bible, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (v. 16). He was saying, "Nicodemus, what I have told you about the new birth may seem simple to you, but it is going to cost God His Son. The only way you can be born again and have this new abundant life is for God at Calvary to give His Son."

John 4: The Samaritan Woman

“So He came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph; and Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. . . .” (vv. 5-7). This woman of Samaria was in every way the very opposite of Nicodemus. She was, first of all, of the opposite sex: She was a woman in a male-oriented society. She was of the wrong race: She was a Samaritan, a part of that mongrel race that the Jews despised. She was of the wrong religion: She worshiped at the wrong place, on Mount Gerizim. She had the wrong lifestyle: She was a most immoral woman. But when Jesus saw her, He saw her as someone who needed the abundant life.

He said to the woman, “Give Me a drink” (v. 7). First, she was shocked that He spoke to her because under normal circumstances, then and now, a person would not speak to a woman on the street in the Middle East. In addition, He was speaking to a Samaritan woman, a despised woman. No Jew would ever enter a Samaritan’s house and eat a morsel of food cooked by a Samaritan, or drink a drop of water that came from a utensil that had ever been touched by a Samaritan.

Jesus, looking at this woman, said, “Would you lower your bucket down into the water, and give me a drink?” Shocked, the woman said, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?” (v. 9).

It turned out that the woman had had five husbands in the past—not one, or two, but five. Even today that would be shocking. Beyond this, she was now living with a person of the opposite sex outside of marriage. She is the worst prospect in the Bible. If we should receive a visitation card to visit this woman, we would look with horror and amazement at the card. But Jesus Christ entered into a discussion with her.

The most detailed conversation recorded in the Bible is right here. If you start in

Genesis and go through Revelation, the single most detailed conversation ever recorded is Christ speaking to this often-married woman. They talked of worship. She said, “Our fathers worshiped in this mountain [pointing up, no doubt, at Gerizim], and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (v. 20). Christ answered, “Yes. You Samaritans do not know what you are worshiping. You are worshiping on the wrong mountain. Salvation is of the Jews.” Christ straightened out that age-old dilemma in a sentence.

Jesus, then, said to her, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (vv. 23, 24). They talked of water. Standing by is the two-thousand-year-old well. Jesus said to her, “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (v. 14).

The woman said to Jesus, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us” (v. 25). Jesus must have fastened His eyes right upon her eyes and said, “I who speak to you am He.” With that the woman took down her waterpot.

As I have traveled in other countries, I have been amazed at the women and their waterpots. A woman can take a huge pot, hold it on her head, and walk perfectly straight. The Samaritan woman reached up, took down her waterpot, set it down, and went running into the town. She said to the men of the city, “Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?” (v. 29).

Something very wonderful happened. John 4 says many of the Samaritans believed on Him because of the saying of the woman. Many more believed because of His own word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and

know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world" (v. 42).

Jesus remained in Samaria for two days. He had a two-day revival. Before the time was over, a number of people had come to faith in Christ. It is no wonder that the very first foreign mission field in the history of the world, outside of Jerusalem, was Samaria. In Acts 8, Philip went to this same place, and many people became Christians. All of it began with one woman, a sinful woman at a well, who said, "I have found the Christ."

This woman had a tangled life. I do not know any way she could unravel all the threads of her life. Five husbands! How many women's hearts had been broken by this woman? I wonder how many men she had taken away from other women. I wonder how many boys in the community had been led down a scarlet, sensuous path by this woman. I wonder how many girls had looked at her and decided to follow a sensuous life. There is no way she could unravel all of this. How does someone unravel a misspent life?

You may have read in the sports pages of the death of the baseball pitcher Donnie Moore. What made it doubly sad was not just his youth, but that he committed suicide. People tried to understand why that young man, who had been a successful pitcher for a California baseball team, had killed himself. The sports writers thought it went back to an event that happened in 1986 from which he had never recovered. This pitcher had thrown the homerun pitch that assured his team that they could not win the pennant and go to the World Series. People had been really rough on him. The sports writers had criticized him rather heavily. Somehow he never forgot it. At his death one writer said, "One brief devastating moment, and all that came before or after is forgotten."

We can tangle up our lives almost beyond recovery. Here is a woman who had lived with five husbands. She had lived in one adulterous bed after another. But Jesus came on the scene and gave her hope by saying to her, "I can give you living water,

and you will never thirst again."

Conclusion

This is what the Lord wishes to give to you. I do not know where you are. Most likely, you are somewhere between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. Nicodemus is at the top of the ladder. You cannot be much better than Nicodemus. He is a college professor or a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He is a good man with a good family, who looks good and acts good. The Samaritan woman has thrown it all away. Jesus said to each of them, back to back in the Bible, "I came that you might have life, and might have it abundantly."

The abundant life that Jesus promises is not an illusion. It is not something that someone chases until his sides are aching and then finds that it is an illusion and does not exist.

The head of the history department at the University of Pennsylvania told of this incident. When he was a child, one day he and his father planted a tree. His father told him, "Son, when you are old, you will sit under this tree." The boy went to college and became a professor at Pennsylvania University. He often thought about what his father had said to him. His father had long since died. Sixty years later he bought a ticket and traveled two thousand miles to where he and his dad had planted the tree. He could not wait; the excitement of sitting under that tree swelled up within him. When he got there, the tree was gone. The family had moved away not long after they had planted the tree, and it had withered and died after their leaving. The tree had just grown and grown in the mind of the man, but when he got there, the tree was gone.

Oh, the illusions of life! We think of how life is going to be when we get this straightened out and that paid for, when the children are reared and when we retire, and suddenly, we discover the tree we were seeking is gone. But Jesus said, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we appear with Him.