

Anyone Can Have The Abundant Life (2)

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

An abundant life is a life that is full, free, and forever satisfying, a life that makes one just as happy Tuesday afternoon as it does Sunday morning, a life that gives, forgives, and never gives up.

The Gospel of John is the gospel of life. John has three words that he seems to use above all others: “love,” “light,” and “life.” Fifty times the Greek word for “life,” *zoe*, is found in the Gospel of John. It is written in the Gospel of John, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (1:4); “I am the light of the world, he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness” (8:12); “I am the bread of life” (6:35); “The words that I speak unto you, they are life” (6:63); “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life” (6:68); “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25); “I am the way, the truth and the life” (14:6). Therefore, we might say that the Gospel of John is the gospel of life.

In chapters 3, 4, 5, and 9 of John, we meet four people who could have hardly been more different from one another, yet all of them needed life. In these four characters each one of us is represented. The Holy Spirit wrote of them for all the centuries to come

because we need to see our type of personality and character needing the abundant life.

We have already seen Nicodemus. He was one of the best of men and did the best of things, but he could not have real life until he had experienced the new birth (3:1-8).

We have also seen the Samaritan woman. She was a member of a despised race and a woman of despised behavior. She was a harlot. She had had five husbands and was living with a man who was not even her husband. Yet, Jesus said to this woman, “I can give you water which will spring up unto everlasting life” (4:14).

John 5: A Crippled Man

John 5:1 says, “After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” One can read some verses again and again without observing the significance that he will later discover in them. If I should ask you, “How old was Jesus when He died?” you would quickly reply, “He was thirty-three years old.” But how do we know that He was thirty-three years of age when He died? Three specific Passover feasts are mentioned in the Gospel of John (2:13; 6:4; 13:1); then 5:1 refers to “a feast of the Jews,” which is also thought to be a Passover feast. Most translations read,

“The feast of the Jews,” but most commentators take the word “feast” to refer to a Passover. This cannot, however, be proven beyond doubt. It is usually thought that since John did not mention what feast this was and since the Passover was the greatest of all the feasts, that he must be referring to a Passover. If this is true, John mentions a total of four Passovers. Christ died at the fourth one, which means He began His ministry at age thirty (Luke 3:23) and lived for approximately three and one-half years before dying at the fourth Passover. Further, if this is true, the passage in Daniel that mentions that “in the middle of the week the sacrifice would cease” (Daniel 9:27) may well be a reference to Jesus. The middle of the week would be three and one-half days. If a day represents a year, as it often does in prophecy, in the middle of the week, three and one-half years after He began His work, Christ died and the sacrifice ceased.

John continues, “Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes” (5:2). Bethesda still exists. It is at a much lower level. The city has built up around it, and the ruins can be seen to this day. A pool was present in that city and there were five colonnaded porches around it. “In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters]” (5:3).

We see here needy people who were blind, crippled, and had withered limbs. They had stretched out rags and quilts and were lying on them. Why were they there? They were waiting for the moving of the waters. They believed that at a certain time during the year an angel came down and stirred this water. They further believed that the first person in the water after the stirring would be healed.

Verse 4 is not found in any of the later versions. This is the case because it is generally thought by textual critics that there is not much textual integrity behind the verse. Only a few of the old manuscripts have the verse. The verse in question says, “An angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped

in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.”

Christ walked under those colonnaded porches that day. He saw one man who had been crippled for thirty-eight years. Jesus walked over to this man and asked, “Do you wish to get well?” That seemed to be an unnecessary question since the man had not walked for thirty-eight years. His very presence at the pool indicated he wished to walk again.

When we think about that question, we recognize that it is not an unnecessary question at all because many people do not wish to improve. If some should suddenly be relieved of their misery, they would not know how to take it. They have learned to enjoy being the object of pity. They have depended upon others for so long to make their living and to handle their problems that if tomorrow they found themselves well, they would be miserable.

Christ said to the man, “Do you wish to get well?” That is the first step toward having an abundant life. If you are not a Christian or not a happy Christian, do you want to be made whole? Are you content to go on like you are now—divided, pulling in two directions, sometimes spiritual and sometimes carnal? Or, do you want to be made whole?

The crippled man answered Jesus by saying, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me” (5:7). “The problem,” he said, “is not me; the problem is someone else. I have been here for years waiting, and every time the water is troubled, I do not have anybody to put me in the pool.” How often have we placed the blame for our condition on someone else?

Here is the second step toward having the abundant life. We must recognize that receiving the abundant life begins with us, not someone else. We can always find people who will not help us. It will always be easy to say, “I do have a problem. I am crippled spiritually, but it is because other people will not help me. If I had not had the kind of father or mother that I had, if I had been born in another place and at another time, if I had gone to a different school. . . .” If, if, if. Jesus just said to the man,

“Do you want to be made whole, or are you going to spend all of your life this way because no one will put you in the pool?”

If you ever have any happiness as a Christian, a decision must rise up from inside of you. Paul said, “Christ lives in me. The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loves me” (Galatians 2:20). As long as I look around and worry myself sick because other people are not helping, I will never get help.

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Jesus immediately said to the man, “Arise, take up your pallet, and walk” (5:8). His bed was just a cot, a thin sleeping bag kind of cot. “And immediately the man became well, and took up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day” (5:9).

The Sabbath always brought the Pharisees out. They came to Jesus and said, “How is it that You have healed this man on Saturday? It is not lawful to heal on the Sabbath day.” It is my understanding that if you go back to the old writings of the Jewish rabbis, you will find thirty-nine chapters on what you could or could not do on the Sabbath. They had it all outlined. They could tell you, for example, how many drops of ink you could put in a pen to write with on Saturday. If you started walking, they could tell you exactly how many steps you could take. They could tell you how many letters you could write on a wall on Saturday.

They said to Jesus, “How is it that you are working on Saturday by healing this man?” Jesus answered, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working” (5:17). He was saying, “If you have an argument about working on Saturday, you must start with God because He works on Saturday.” Jesus then told them that His business was life (5:21, 25),

not nitpicking.

When the healed man learned who Jesus was, he went immediately to the enemies of Jesus and told them who it was who had healed him. We do not read of his praising God. We do not read of his exclaiming his faith in the Lord. The story ends, and so far as we know, he had taken no real step toward the Lord. Could it be that he was one of those many people across the centuries who have received God’s blessing and given nothing in return?

Toward the end of chapter 5, Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life” (5:39, 40). We are unsure if the man ever came to Jesus to have life.

John 9: A Blind Man

John 9:1, 2 says, “And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?’” Christ explained to His disciples that this man was not born blind because anybody had sinned.

We try to dismiss tragedy by philosophizing about it. We are tempted to look at the blind man and say, “I know it is sad, but if his mother had not sinned, he would not be blind.” But when Christ saw the man, He did not philosophize about what had happened. He just said, “This is a man who was born blind and needs life.”

Jesus did a wonderful thing: “When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, and said to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’” (9:6, 7). Everyone must have wondered at what He was doing. Christ spit on the ground. He reached down and gathered up the dust and spittle. He then worked it into the clay and wiped it on the man’s eyes. He next told him to go down to the pool of Siloam and wash in it.

The blind man went down to the pool of Siloam, just as the Lord had said. Granted, the Lord could have healed him without his going

to the pool of Siloam, but that was what the Lord commanded. The blind man obediently stumbled along down to the pool of Siloam and washed his eyes, washing off the clay, and when he returned, he was seeing.

Suddenly different people appeared on the scene. The Pharisees were present. Because it was the Sabbath, the Pharisees began to say, "This man is not from God. He does not keep the Sabbath" (9:16). It seemed obvious to the Pharisees that this could not be God's work because one was not supposed to heal people on Saturday. That would be working.

After the Pharisees had registered their disapproval, they brought forth the parents of the man. You would think the parents of the man would be overwhelmed with happiness about their son's healing. They asked the parents, "Is this your son, whom you say was born blind? How does he now see?" (9:19). The parents, having no courage whatever, said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he shall speak for himself" (9:20, 21). John commented that they said this because they feared the Jews, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. To be put out of the synagogue meant that one became a non-person in the Jewish city. No one would speak to him. They would not give him a job. Most likely, that is why his parents merely said, "He is of age. Ask him."

Word had come to Jesus that the blind man had been put out of the synagogue. Jesus found the blind man, and said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" (9:35). The blind man said, "And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" (9:36). Jesus said, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you" (9:37). He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped Him (9:38).

What a wonderful thing happened that

day! Every time we sing, "I once was blind but now I see," we are reminded of this man who said, "Lord, I believe."

It was such a simple thing that happened to him. No lightning struck. No earthquake came. His response was just a simple statement: "Lord, I believe."

Conclusion

We may not be on the level of Nicodemus. He was a tremendous person, but he found out that he could have the abundant life only through the new birth. I hope that none of us is as sinful as the Samaritan woman, but even she found that she could have abundant life. A wretched man who had been crippled for thirty-eight years, lying on a dirty blanket near the pool of Bethesda, could have had the abundant life. I do not know that any of us has a problem as longstanding as the man born blind. For forty years he had not been able to see, but he found that he could have abundant life in Jesus.

Francis Scott Key was an American lawyer and poet who wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner" for Americans. Notice what Francis Scott Key said about something else. In later years he wrote these beautiful words: "Nothing but Christianity will give you the victory. Until a man believes in his heart that Jesus Christ is his Lord and Master, his course through life will be neither safe nor pleasant." Francis Scott Key was right. Until a man believes in Jesus, his course through life will not be safe or pleasant.

If you do not have the abundant life, the question of our Lord to you is this, "Do you wish to be well, or would you prefer to stay a cripple all your life?" Or, to re-phrase the question, "Will you be born again, or would you prefer to stay in the old man of sin all of your life?"