

An Abundant Life

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Today we will consider another lesson from our annual theme, Adding More in 2024. In the gospel of John, Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd. Using this illustration, He contrasted Himself with the self-serving leadership of the Pharisees. Like hired hands, they would not put themselves in danger to protect the flock. Jesus, however, would die for the flock.

In the middle of this scene, Jesus spoke about His desire for believers to have a fulfilling life. He said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). This is a gracious expression of Jesus. But what does this mean? How can we receive such a life?

About the Abundant Life

1). Common conceptions of the abundant life. This teaching of Jesus has been used to promote a gospel of health and wealth. The prosperity gospel is a dominant message of our culture. Many preach that if we follow Jesus, He will make us rich. As we might expect, many have followed Jesus in the hope of becoming financially wealthy.

If this is true, then why did Jesus say things like, “...Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Matt. 8:20)? Why did Jesus warn, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt. 6:19-21)?

The abundant life Jesus came to offer is not about money. It’s not about sports cars. It’s not about a comfortable retirement. It’s about something different.

2). An empty life. Many people seek wealth hoping to find fulfillment. If they could attain a certain social status, they could somehow have peace. Again, Jesus said things like, “...one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). Trying to find fulfillment through social status, academic achievement, career success, or some other accomplishment will never bring satisfaction.

We live in a culture where we can achieve success. We can set goals, work hard, and accomplish our goals. We might even exceed our greatest expectations. However, the more we rely on our success to find fulfillment, the more our awareness of the depths of our emptiness will increase.

For example, consider the life of Cheslie Kryst. She was a young, vibrant, highly accomplished woman. Academically, she earned three degrees. She was a lawyer, an Emmy Award-nominated TV correspondent, and a Miss USA pageant champion.

In an article reflecting on her then-upcoming 30th birthday, she wrote about her quest for accomplishment. She wrote, “Too often, I noticed that the only people impressed by my accomplishment were those who wanted it for themselves. Meanwhile, I was rewarded with a lonely craving for the next award. Some would see this hunger and label it “competitiveness”; others might call it the unquenchable thirst of insecurity.”

With this acknowledgment, Kryst wanted to do things differently. In the last line of her essay, she wrote, “Now, I enter year 30 searching for joy and purpose on my own terms: and that feels like my own sweet victory.” Kryst enjoyed her 30th birthday. She did not live to see her 31st. Tragically, Kryst committed suicide. She jumped from the balcony of her high-rise apartment.

Kryst suffered from depression. Multiple factors undoubtedly contributed to Kryst’s untimely death. However, there was an overwhelming sense of emptiness despite her success.

There are many people today living with this same awareness of emptiness. They feel alone in the world. People feel hollow and disillusioned by a life that seems meaningless. Jesus came to prevent us from being overcome by the world’s emptiness.

3). What Jesus offers. First, Jesus offers us a new identity. Jesus wants to put us in Him making us God’s children. We can become known by God. With this new identity, we can gain confidence to face life.

Second, Jesus offers us a new purpose for our lives. He empowers us to become self-giving stewards of His Father’s world. This was the original purpose God gave to man. Instead of living for ourselves, we find fulfillment by living like the One who died for us (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Third, Jesus offers us contentment. Instead of being burdened by searching for fulfillment through self-accomplishment, Jesus offers us peace through service. Jesus was known to teach that it was better to give than receive (Acts 20:35). After all, Jesus came to lay His life down for the sheep. In death, Jesus was at peace having faithfully served His Father by sacrificing for the world.

Conclusion

Would we describe our lives as abundant? We are quick to acknowledge that we are blessed, but are we at peace? We can be blessed, but not have peace. We can be full of accomplishments, but deep down be empty.

So, how can we enjoy the abundant life Jesus offers? We must hear His voice and follow His lead. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. His sheep are fed and protected. Also, we must reject the voices of the hired hands. The people promising fulfillment through worldly success are to be dismissed. They lead their followers to emptiness and death.

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”

John 10:27-30