

“I came that they may have life.”

John 10:7–10

In January of this year, the New York Times ran an article entitled, “Yale’s Most Popular Class Ever: Happiness.” The article was referring to what was officially listed as *Psyc 157, Psychology and the Good Life*. It was a course taught by Laurie Santos to teach students how to lead a happier, more satisfying life. Santos addressed issues that people think will make them happy, but don’t, and more importantly it addressed things that do bring lasting life satisfaction. It was a class about life. It was a class about how to have the good life. 1,200 undergraduates enrolled making it the most popular class in Yale’s 316-year history!

This interest in the good life is not just an interest of college students; it is an interest for all of us. How else do you explain the hundreds of books written on how to have a better life? There are all sorts of people offering wisdom on how to have the good life, right? Practice mindfulness. Get more rest. Unclutter. Travel more. Change your diet. Some of this is really helpful, but if we really want to understand life and how to have the good life, we would be wise to listen to the one who actually created life and who has told us that the reason he came to earth was that we might have life and have it abundantly.

This Advent season, we have been looking at statements that Jesus made about himself and why he came into the world. In John 10:10, Jesus said this:

¹⁰ . . . *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

Today, I want us to take some time to think this about this life that Jesus came to bring. Specifically, I want to look at three simple questions: (1) What is this life? (2) What’s the source of this life? And, (3) How do we experience this life? And so let’s look at the first question.

I. What is this Life that Jesus Came to Bring?

Thirty-six times in the gospel of John, we find the word, “life” (Greek = *Zōē*). Of these 36 occurrences, 17 times it is modified by “eternal.” For instance just a little later in chapter 10, Jesus says:

²⁷ *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*

Or in John 11 Jesus says:

²⁵ *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”*

Now, in this second passage, Jesus doesn't use the word, "eternal," but that is what he is talking about. And so the life that Jesus came to bring is the kind of life that if we have it we will *never perish* (10:28). It is a kind of like that if we have it, though we die physically, we never truly die. And so **the life that Jesus came to bring is eternal life.**

I remember as a little boy wanting this life. I understood that there was a heaven and a hell and I wanted this never-perishing, never-dying kind of life. I wanted to know that when I died, I would live forever with God in heaven. In my mind at that time this life was only about something in the future. But here's the deal, eternal life is not just something that is in the future. It doesn't just start when we die physically.

When you look at how Jesus describes this life, he often describes it as a present possession. For instance in John 5:24, Jesus says this:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

To him who believes, he *has eternal life*. The verb in the present tense meaning that this eternal life is something we have now. It is not just a future hope.

Jesus goes on to say that the one who has eternal life *has passed out of death into life*. The verb in this phrase is in the perfect tense, which means that there is a completed action in the past that brings about a state of being in the present. That state of being in the present is eternal life. And so for the believer, **eternal life is something we can experience in the here and now as well as for all eternity.** This is the life that Jesus came to bring.

Now to bring a little more clarity to what this life is exactly, I want us to look at how Jesus defined eternal life. In John 17:3 Jesus said this:

³ *This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*

The life that Jesus came to bring to us is an eternal relationship with the God of the universe. Through Jesus we can have an unhindered, face-to-face relationship with God that brings about a whole new quality of life. And so **Jesus defined eternal life as a relationship with God.** And this relationship with God, is a life that can be full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). It is a life of walking in the joy of obedience and in a freedom in which we are no longer slaves of sin (Rom. 6:4).

This is the kind of life that Jesus came to bring us and he says that he wants us to have all of this in abundance. *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly* – "to the full" as the NIV says it. Love to the full. Joy to the full. Peace to the full. Self-control to the full. Are you actually experiencing this life, not just in theory, but in reality? This is the life Jesus came to bring.

Let's go on and look at the second question.

II. What is the Source of this Life?

It might seem like we really don't need to look at this question because if Jesus came to bring life then obviously he is the source of this life right? Jesus IS the source of this life. But I do think we need to flesh this out a bit. Look at John 10 again. In verse 7 we read this:

⁷ So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ "All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

Starting back in verse one Jesus talks about sheep and shepherds and sheepfolds. In first century Palestine a sheepfold was an enclosure into which the sheep would be gathered at night for protection. They would typically be made of stone or a kind of mud-brick structure and they would have one opening, one door. Jesus says, "I'm that opening. I am the door." In saying that he is the door, Jesus is saying that **he alone is the source of this life** (cf. John 14:6). That's the point that is important for us to hear - Jesus ALONE is the source of life.

In verse 9, he gets very clear about the implications. He says that *if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture*. In the metaphor when sheep enter into a sheepfold for the night, they are *saved*. They are protected from anything that might harm them if they were left outside the sheepfold for the night. Jesus is saying that if we enter through him, the door, we are saved eternally. We are saved from judgment. We are saved from all that our sin and rebellion against God deserve. We are saved from the power of sin that we might live a new kind of life.

Secondly, in the metaphor, Jesus says that the sheep will *go in and out and find pasture*. This is a picture of provision. The shepherd leads the sheep out into fields that meet their needs. For those who enter through the door of Jesus, this points to entering into a relationship with a Heavenly Father who meets our needs. There is provision. There is plenty. Jesus is the door to all of this – salvation and provision. Others may claim to open the way to God, but **Jesus alone is the source of this life**.

I think we get this when it comes to experiencing eternal life forever with God in the future. We believe that Jesus alone is the source of that. But when it comes to experiencing abundant life now, we may say that Jesus is the source, but in reality we sometimes think that what we really need to be able to experience abundant life is Jesus plus something.

Sometimes we look for abundant life in a relationship. We believe that if we could be in a dating relationship, or if we could get married, or if our marriage was better, then we'd really experience life.

Sometimes we look for abundant life from money or possessions. We think that if we could have a better income or if we could acquire a certain possession, a house, a car, a new piece of technology that we'd really be experiencing life.

Sometimes we look for abundant life from certain pleasures or experiences. We think that if we could take a certain vacation or retire in luxury or experience any number of pleasures then we'd really be living.

Now, I'm not saying that there is anything wrong with having any of these things, but none of these things bring abundant life. Abundant life isn't found by having Jesus plus something. Jesus alone is the source of abundant life. Are you looking to Jesus alone for life?

Jesus came to bring life – a kind of life that is eternal, but that can be experienced in the here and now in a kind of quality of life that we can experience through Christ. He alone is the source of this life. This leads us to our final question and that is this:

III. How Can We Experience this Life?

In thinking about this it is important to remember how Jesus defines this life. Jesus defines this life as a relationship with God. Remember what he said in John 17:3?

³ "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

And so, how do we experience this relationship with God? Right at the end of his Gospel, John says this about his reason for writing his gospel:

but these have been written so 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

John says that he wrote what he wrote, that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing, we would have life in His name. Over and over again, John says that **we experience this life through believing in Jesus.**

To believe in Jesus is to believe that he came and died for our sins and that he rose again from the dead to give us new life. This belief is not just intellectual assent; it is full and complete trust. And so we experience this life, this relationship with God, by believing in Jesus.

Now, I want to look at John 10:10 again, because Jesus addresses a threat to experiencing this life. Jesus talks about a thief who comes to steal, and kill, and destroy.

¹⁰ *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

In the past when I read this verse, I always read this as a contrast between Jesus and the devil. And while it is an accurate description of the devil and what he seeks to do, in the context Jesus is talking about those teachers who came before him who proclaimed another way of salvation. Back in verse 8, Jesus says that *All who came before [him] are thieves and robbers.*

⁸ *“All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.*

In saying this he isn't talking about all the teachers who came before him. There were legitimate teachers who rightly pointed to Christ (John the Baptist for instance). Rather, he is talking about false messiahs, and corrupt priests and prophets, and even more specifically, in the immediate context he is talking about the Jewish religious leaders who were listening to him at this very moment (9:40). They are thieves and robbers who care nothing for the sheep.

Jesus was sharing these metaphors after the events of chapter 9. In chapter 9 Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth (9:1). The man comes to faith in Jesus and he begins to experience life. The problem with this for the religious leaders is that Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath. And so instead of rejoicing with the man in his healing the Pharisees get into a controversy with the man about his healing, which escalates to the point where they kick him out of the synagogue (9:34). They didn't care about him. They were only concerned about upholding their religious rules. In the context, Jesus is saying that the Pharisees are thieves and robbers.

The Pharisee's approach to God was legalism. They insisted that the way to God was by keeping their code of manmade rules. If you didn't keep the rules, you were rejected.

There are still plenty of “thieves and robbers” out there who offer a different vision for how you experience life. They insist that their manmade rules are the only way to God and the life He offers. And sometimes we can get drawn into this. There is something in us that wants to “earn it.” We want to earn our relationship with God. But Jesus is clear; life is not found in following manmade rules. If we go that way it kills, it steals, it destroys. We experience this life only through believing in Jesus. There is no other way.

Some of you here today know about Jesus, but you have never actually expressed faith in Jesus personally. My hope for you this Christmas season is that you would actually experience this reason that Jesus came to earth and that is to give you life – eternal life and life of a new quality here on earth. You can't earn it. You can't work for it. All you can do is receive it as a gift by believing that Jesus died and rose again for you. When you do, John says you *have life in His name*. Won't you choose to believe in Jesus?

And for all of us, my hope is that we would each experience this eternal life in the here and now. Remember that this life is a relationship with the God of the universe. To the extent that you trust God and develop your relationship with God, you will more and more experience this life – this new quality of life found through Jesus.

Jesus came to bring life. Jesus came to bring an abundant life for all of us, not just in theory, but in real and practical ways. Jesus alone is the source of this life.

As I close, I want share something that I've shared before that I believe illustrates well what this abundant life is all about. Many of you know that my sister died when she was 38 years old. On December 27, 1999, she was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. Ten months later, she died leaving behind a husband and five children. Her youngest child was just six months old when Kim died.

As you can imagine, those 10 months were not easy for Kim. They were full of suffering and grieving and struggle, but in the midst of all of that there was life - abundant life. In the last days of Kim's life she wrote some words to be shared at her homecoming service. I want to read some excerpts of that to you because you can get a glimpse of this life. Kim said:

I trusted Him to save me as a young child but I didn't begin to truly live for Him until college. Since then it's been the best adventure of experiencing true life!
And that's to know Jesus!

After writing some thoughts on how God blessed her with her husband, Bob, and her kids she continues:

. . . In this struggle with the tumor, God's great love has met me. He's been there and has blessed and been good.

And then she quotes an author:

“We will learn to celebrate in the midst of our pains only when we believe those pains are the tools of our transformation. This world is a training ground for eternity with God. His magnificent purpose is to make us holy as He is holy. He works within all the pains that make us cry and the joys that make our hearts sing to implant His character deep within.”

Later Kim said:

. . . the strength to go through this is knowing Him to be my loving FATHER, my Daddy, who promises to work all things out for my good because I love Him and am called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). It's been in knowing that He is all-powerful and sovereign (nothing happens without Him allowing it).

I've experienced His loving arms cradling me at the darkest times. The body of Christ's love and unceasing prayers have poured forth His love to me and for that great testimony to you I lovingly thank you . . .

Finally, I urge you on to keep praying, and to believe God to do exceedingly, abundantly beyond all that we can ask or imagine. People are out there dying eternally with spiritual brain tumors. May the church pray for them and reach them with the love of Christ!

I'll be waiting to celebrate with you and I'm ready to go and run with Jesus!!
Kim

In the midst of her suffering, Kim experienced God's love. That's life. In the midst of her suffering, Kim experienced a grateful heart. That's life. In the midst of her suffering, Kim knew that God was transforming her and implanting His character with in her. That's life. In the midst of her suffering, Kim experienced God as a loving Daddy who was taking care of her and cradling her in His arms. That's life. In the midst of her suffering, Kim didn't turn inward, right to the end she was thinking about others who needed Christ. That's life.

Those ten months were not easy for Kim, but she experienced life abundantly. She experienced a relationship with God that sustained her and gave her a quality of life in the midst of her suffering that could only be explained as God's life within her. And then on Oct. 26, 2000, Kim died, but she didn't really die. She went from life on this earth to eternal life in God's presence. She experienced all of this because of Jesus. Jesus came into this world to bring life.

Jesus came to bring an abundant life for all of us, not just in theory, but in real and practical ways; when things are good and when things are hard. Jesus alone is the source of this life. And the only way we can experience this life is through believing in Jesus.

Amen.