

Abundant Life: John 10:1-18

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Tonight we are going to look at John, chapter 10 and the purpose for which Jesus said he came to earth. So please turn with me to John 10 and we'll read verses 1-18.

(1) Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

(7) So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

What a beautiful description of who Jesus Christ is, the good Shepherd! There are so many beautiful illustrations in this passage of Christ's sacrificial love, of his protection and provision for his us, His sheep. It speaks of the bond of love between Jesus and God the Father, of Jesus tender care and desire for there to be unity among believers when he speaks of one flock. Surely there is a richness here that could and should provide months worth of sermons. We're going to primarily focus our attention tonight on verse 10, where Jesus states his intention, his purpose for coming when he says "I came that they (his sheep) may have life and have it abundantly."

First I'd like us to consider the context in which Jesus declares this purpose for his coming to earth, for his condescending to become a man. He is teaching here about who he is by using one of the seven "I Am" statements he makes in John, namely "I am the Good Shepherd". As he speaks of his provision for his sheep and of them hearing his voice, he also speaks of those who are not his sheep - thieves and robbers and strangers. These strangers, he tells us in verse 5, "the sheep will not follow, but they will flee from

him, for they do not know the voice of the strangers.”. But in verse 6 John tells us that the people still didn’t understand what he was talking about. So Jesus tries again once more in verse 7, saying “I am the door of the sheep”. He goes on to tell them “If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” And this leads us to verse 10, a sort of culmination of this theme in the first 10 verses. These thieves and robbers he says, only come to the sheepfold to steal and kill and destroy. **But** “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”.

Now if we were to approach a random person in the street tonight and say to them “Jesus Christ came to this earth that you might have life!” what do you think their reaction would be? If you tell someone Jesus can make them alive, whether they say it or not, one of the first thoughts that is almost guaranteed to run through their minds is “I’m already alive!”. Scripture plainly tells us that until they have new life in Christ this is plainly not true. Ephesians 2:1 and 2 tells us “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience”. So we, Christ’s sheep, are dead before and without the life that he came to bring.

So returning to Christ’s statement “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”: we see the need for him to bring life. But to who? Who is the “they” he is referring to in verse 10? If we back up a little in the passage we see that it is Christ’s sheep. Okay, so who are Christ’s sheep? Verse 4 tells us “When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice”. So Christ’s sheep are those who hear his voice. But how do the sheep know his voice? How do dead sheep hear and know Jesus voice? I submit to you that its the same way Lazarus heard and knew Jesus’ voice in John 11. John 11:43-45: “When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth.”. Just as Lazarus was made alive by Jesus’ words so we (his sheep) are made alive by his words. There is nothing distinctive about his sheep that makes them his sheep, but it is his voice that makes them his sheep. As Isaiah 55:11 tells us “So shall My word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to Me void; But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” There is a beautiful certainty here that we are Christ’s sheep not because of our ability to hear his voice or a unique characteristic of ours that allows us to hear his voice – but it is his **mighty** and **effective** word that causes us both to hear his voice, hearken to it and therefore are numbered among his sheep.

So we see that the good Shepherd, Christ Jesus, has come to bring life to us, those whom he has chosen to be his sheep. He also tells us that he came that we might “have life and have it more abundantly”. I’d like us to think now about this *abundant life*. What is the nature of abundant life? What is the nature of the new “abundant” life that Christ brings to us, previously dead in trespasses and sins?

First, let’s think about our word “abundance”. It comes from two Latin words *ab* and *undare* which mean “to rise in waves” or “to overflow”. J.M. Boice tells us in his commentary, “The first translation gives a picture of the unceasing rise of the waves upon

a seashore. There the waves rise again and again. One wave surges forward and exhausts its force on the sand, but another follows and another and another. Thus it will continue as long as time lasts. The other picture is of a flood. This makes us think of a river fed by heavy rains, rising irresistibly until it overflows its banks. The abundant life is, therefore, one in which we are content in the knowledge that God's grace is more than sufficient for our needs, that nothing can suppress it, and that God's favor toward us is unending." The Greek word for "abundance" used here is *perissos*. It has a mathematical connotation and generally means a surplus. It is used in Matthew 14:20 when Jesus feeds the five thousand and there is an excess of food. Also the Greek word for life used here is *zoe*, which refers to life in the spirit and soul. It is a spiritual life. Contrast the use of that word, with the word typically used, *bios* which connotes the duration or means of physical life. So Jesus came to the earth and gave us his life that we might have abundant **spiritual** life.

We do need to be careful with what "abundant life" does not mean. It first of all does not mean that we are abundantly satisfied in our earthly desires. Christ has not given us life so that we can own a bigger house or drive a nicer car. If we lack earthly wealth it is not because of a lack of faith on our part as some health wealth and prosperity peddlers would have us believe. Rather it is because we have a much greater treasure and cannot be satisfied with those things.

Abundant life also does not mean that Christ has provided for his sheep a life free of suffering. In fact he tells us the complete opposite. He tells his disciples in John 15 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" and "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you". I don't know about you, but being hated doesn't immediately fit into what comes to mind when I think of "abundant life"; but it should because Jesus tells us plainly that it is so. The great blessing for us is we are hated by darkness and evil and loved by the only true Light.

Even beyond being hated by the world we will also suffer in this abundant life because of remaining sin in our own lives. God uses suffering to sanctify us, to discipline us, his children. This is unpleasant to our earthly bodies and again may not seem to fit into our typical connotation of "abundant life", but scripture promises that it is so. Hebrews 12 tells us "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Clearly abundant life is not marked by an absence of suffering but productive suffering.

OK, so we've look at a couple of ways of interpreting abundant life that are clearly not biblical. What are characteristics of the abundant life that Christ gives. We will examine three.

First, abundant life is eternal. It is ever lasting. The life Christ gives is blessed in this world, but it is not only or even primarily blessed in this world. Our hope, our reward and ultimate satisfaction is fulfilled in spending eternity with our greatest treasure, Jesus Christ. While the world is seeking fulfillment in their lives here on earth, in their possessions, in their sinful and selfish lifestyles we have a much greater hope and reward not dependant on these temporary things that we know will rust and decay and be destroyed. Jesus tells his sheep "I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." Our reward is to be in God's presence for eternity and to enjoy Him and His goodness forever.

In addition to the life being eternal, it is also secure. It is secure in the sense that if we are Christ's sheep there is nothing that thieves and robbers can do to remove us from his arms and from under his tender care. To see this surety, we can hold to Romans 8:29-30 when Paul tells us "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." We see the beautiful and assuring unbroken chain. When Paul speaks of God predestining his children, that is analogous to the Good Shepherd choosing his sheep. At each step of the chain then there are no sheep lost. There are none who are predestined that are not called. There are none who are called who are not justified. And there are none who are justified who will not be glorified with Christ! This hope, this longing for complete fellowship with Christ is precisely the "overflow", the abundance that characterizes the Christian life. We have a hope and a purpose far beyond anything the world can offer or hope for. Our hope is built on the blood of Jesus and his death on the cross on our behalf, something more real and more sure than anything this world can hope for.

And that brings us to the third characteristic of the abundant life: contentment. The hope and a purpose that we have in Christ gives us a contentedness in Him that nothing else can provide. We have a great picture of this contentment in the 23rd Psalm:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

We see right away the contentment showing through in the first verse: “The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want”. We have no want or need of anything because our Good Shepherd has provided all things. His provision is sufficient for all things.

Again in verse 2 David describes how we do not lack rest. “He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul”. J.M. Boice in his commentary tells us that “Sheep do not lie easily lie down. It is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met. Owing to their timidity they refuse to lie down unless they are free of all fear. Because of the social behavior within a flock sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind. If tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down ... Lastly sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be free from hunger. Freedom from fear tension, aggravation, and hunger! These are the four necessities. And the most important thing is that it is only the shepherd himself who can provide them”

Moving on to verse 3 of Psalm 23 we see our ability to be content in the Shepherd’s guidance. How he “leads me beside still waters” and “he leads me in the paths of righteousness”. We, like sheep, are stupid creatures and we are in great need of God’s guidance! God leads us to and in everything necessary for abundant life!

Verse 4 brings to light the security and confidence we have in the abundant life when David says “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me”. First we see that we will walk through valleys. The abundant life does not mean we are always kept on high, secure ground. Our shepherd leads us through those valleys, those times of testing, so that we will hold fast to Him and so his faithfulness to us can be displayed. He promises to be with us, to be our assurance and our rock.

Similarly verse 5 shows us the provision he makes for us. The shepherd provides peace and feeding even when enemies lurk nearby. The anointing oil and overflowing cup here represents God’s blessing. We see this symbol used throughout the Psalms. In Psalm

103:14-15 we see God's provision laid out and these same symbols used: "You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart." Throughout scriptures we see the many marvelous ways that God orders his creation to provide for our needs and richly bless us.

Finally we see in verse 6 our hope – the Lord's goodness and mercy following us all of our days and dwelling in the house of the Lord, or in other words, fellowship with Him forever! This is the longing and the joy of the Christian life, our great reward to enjoy and to look forward to.

Application

So looking toward application of these precious truths, how does this affect tonight or tomorrow or next year? With the understanding of the this abundant life that we've been given – how should that change or how should that be characterized by our daily lives?

1. Live joyful contented lives in Him – His grace overflows to us and we can and should be completely satisfied in Him.

Our greatest source of contentment and of joy is knowing that Christ came to bring us life – by doing one thing: serving as an atonement for his sheep on the cross by laying down his life.

In Other Words ...

Romans 8:31-32

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?