

"That They – That You – May Have Life!"

There is (or at least used to be) a ministry on route 322, just west of Brickerville, called *Abundant Living Ministries*. What an appropriate name for a Christian ministry - for the One whom we worship and serve came to give us *abundant life*!

The Scripture text for today is John 10:20, these words of Jesus: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly".

There are many places in the Bible where it says Jesus is the life and wants to give us *life*! The Gospel of John and the letters of John in particular underscore this theme! Jesus Himself said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). There's a special quality of life that Jesus gives us when we get connected to Him!

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). The word translated "abundantly" is the Greek word *perissos*. It means: superior in quantity and quality, excellent, above ordinary, exceedingly, beyond measure. Someone has suggested that a good image of this word is to think of a sponge soaked in water, and when you bring it up, it's dripping water everywhere. *That's what the life Jesus gives looks and feels like!*

In a moment I want to talk about some characteristics of this abundant life, but first let me say that *a lot of people are seeking abundant living in counterfeit ways*. What comes to your mind when you think of "the good life"? A rich and full life?

Some people think it means having a lot of money and what money can buy. We can envy the rich and famous with their yachts and expensive cars and homes in Malibu (or even the pricey homes in Lancaster County). "Man, if I only had plenty of dough...I'd be content."

Having a lot of money may make life more pleasant, but not necessarily. I'll never forget a lady in my congregation early in my ministry. She was a young mother with beautiful family. Her parents owned a mountain resort nearby, and I had heard they were millionaires. (And that was a while back, when it meant something to be a millionaire! I think I was making \$7,000 a year as a fulltime pastor. Her marriage was coming apart, and she sat in my study, with a pained look on her face, and said, "All I want is to be happy." Muhammed Ali, after gaining fame and wealth as a former heavyweight boxing champion of the world, said, "I had the world, and it wasn't nuthin."

And then there are those who think that the spoils of the good life are for those who are popular and good looking. Man, if only we could look like some of the movie stars and have adoring fans like them! If only we were better looking or had money for better clothes! I think of my high school days. There was this kid I sat behind in a lot of classes, because his last name started with an "H", and I, of course, was Ka. He was blonde, good-looking, kind of a clown. His dad was a medical doctor. He was popular with the girls. However, their oohs and ahs never moved back a seat to me at the desk behind him. He was a nice guy, and we hit it off. I have no idea whatever happened to him, but I admit at times it was hard not to be jealous and think, "What a life he has!"

If you've ever been picked on for the way you look, or made fun of for the way you dress, it's easy to think that the rich and full life has a lot to do with how popular or good looking we are, or how we dress. But it doesn't. In fact, some of the so-called "beautiful people" are rather ugly inside.

*Then, some people try to find a full and happy life by living with little or no moral restraints. Have fun! Live it up. Life's a beach. (Certainly don't let any religion get in the way of your having a ball!). This kind of *hedonism*, or abandoning yourself to pleasure, was embodied in the late *Hugh Hefner*, founder and head of the *Playboy* empire. I remember talking to a guy in my congregation once after I had preached about a Christian view of sex, and how it differs from the *Playboy* philosophy. And this parishioner mentioned Hefner, kind of smiled, and made a comment like, "Yeah, he's got the life!" (At least my friend was honest!)*

Hefner was in his 80's, living in his *Playboy* mansion with his 3 *Playmate* girlfriends, who were young enough to be his grandchildren. There was even a TV show, *The Girls Next Door*, that detailed the day-to-day trivial pursuits of these 3 narcissistic, self-absorbed young women. Every once in a while "Hef" appeared on screen - in his silk pajamas and robe, or in his sea captain's hat and sneakers - trying to act like he's 25 or 30 years old. If this is the abundant life and the good life the world offers, it's pretty pathetic! He's dead now. How many remember and celebrate his life?

So, we can get derailed in our pursuit of the abundant life by going down these tracks that lead to counterfeit replicas of the real thing!

What kind of a life is Jesus offering us when He says, "I've come that you may have life, and have it more abundantly?"

It's a life in relationship with God. God is the Source of all life. We don't have any life apart from Him. Every one of us, when we're born, are given *physical* life by God. But we're more than just physical beings. We're spiritual beings. And we only come alive *spiritually* when we're in a *relationship* with God.

The problem is, because of our sin as human beings, we're far from God. The Bible says we're "dead" in our sins, enemies of God! So, we need to get back to God again, and close to God. That's where Jesus fits in. It is Jesus who connects us to God, who is the Source of life and joy. Ephesians 2:4 says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...". You can't have a full and abundant life without being in relationship with God.

The Wall Street Journal once ran an article that told the story of Mary Kay Powell, then president of Rastar Productions, a Hollywood production company. I quote from that article in the Journal: "Decades of 80-hour work weeks passed, as Ms. Powell produced or co-produced everything from 'Barbarians at the Gate' to 'Harriet the Spy.' Weekends found her on private jets bound for resorts in Mexico or Arizona. But along the way, she said, unease set in that she had

lost sight of what was important. 'At first I couldn't put my finger on it,' she said. And then it hit her: 'I'm separated from God. I am going to sound nuts, but it wasn't until I asked God to forgive me for being away - off center - that life, as it were, began to come together again.' She discovered the truth Jesus was describing when he said, "I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly." Isn't that a terrific Wall Street Journal sermon! Preach it, brothers and sisters!

The abundant life only begins when we know and experience God in our lives!

Then too, ***the abundant life Jesus offers is a surrendered, sold-out life.*** We have this idea that as long as *I* can be in control of my life, I'll be OK. I have found that it's when *I want to control my life* and *I want to fashion my own destiny*, and *leave God out of the picture*, that life comes apart for me. This is what "sin" is - trying to run my own life without God at the center.

You know, to be very frank here, there are a lot of people who say they're Christians who don't look much like their living the abundant life! They don't show any joy, any enthusiasm for living. Their life just isn't full and running over!

I think one reason for this is that some of us, even though we're sincere Christians, are fairly dysfunctional people. That's why I believe so much in the healing power of counseling and therapy.

But another reason is this: We're not sold out for Christ. Oh, we're Christians, sort of. We'll go to church. We'll believe the right stuff. We'll try to act like Christians, in some ways. But we've never really surrendered the core of our self, and our total will, to Christ. Jesus put it this way, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:25). *You want the full, overflowing, joyful life Jesus offers? Give your life away to Him.*

Also, ***the abundant life Jesus offers embraces pain and suffering.*** Some of us get the idea that if you have this abundant life Jesus offers you're going to be constantly happy and smiling, and God is going to make things go our way all the time! And then, when bad things happen, or life stinks for a while, we think: "Yeah, Jesus, where's all this abundant life you talked about?"

Back when I was in training to be a psychotherapist, I was in class one day, and the instructor said something on this topic of abundant living that was just kind of a revelation for me. You know how sometimes somebody says something, and the light goes on. This was one of those moments. I wish I could quote what my instructor said, but it was something like this: *Living a full life doesn't mean the absence of pain and suffering. But it means allowing yourself to experience that pain as a part of life, and living through each moment of it to the fullest.*

See, living the abundant life of Jesus doesn't mean things are always going to go our way and bad things won't happen to us. It doesn't mean trying to *avoid and escape* these painful experiences, but rather *accepting* them - even *embracing* them. Think about it - isn't it true that some of the richest and fullest experiences in life grow out of the soil of hardship and suffering?

Sometimes it's then that we gain the most insight about life, or our character is shaped the most. Zig Ziglar, a Christian motivational speaker and author, wrote a book called *Over the Top*. In it he tells the story of a man named Charlie Edemeyer, from Los Gatos, California. Charlie coached the high school football team to the only state championship they've ever won. One day Zig Ziglar attended a practice session with Charlie and his team. As the two of them were carrying on an extended conversation from the sidelines during practice, every once in a while an assistant coach would run up and ask questions about an offensive or defensive assignment. Without hesitation, Charlie, who had been watching intently during their whole conversation, would spell out the specifics he should follow. A few moments later, another coach would come by with a question, and again Charlie had an answer ready for him.

But the amazing thing was that the only parts of Charlie's body he could move were his eyes and mouth. Charlie Wedemeyer suffered from Lou Gehrig's disease. This disease had physically affected Charlie so much that no sound could come from his mouth. His wife, Lucy, was his interpreter. She would read his lips and effectively deliver the message. Yet Charlie had the most remarkable attitude and the greatest sense of humor. Not only did he coach football, he traveled and spoke regularly to people in churches, schools, businesses and prisons. He and Lucy communicate a powerful message of faith and hope and courage and a never-give-up spirit! Wouldn't you say Charlie is living the abundant life Jesus offers! I would!

Abundant living is not the absence of suffering, but the presence of God in our suffering, enabling us to fully live each moment, no matter how difficult it may be. A member of one of my churches – a passionate Dallas Cowboys fan – loaned me a book about the late Tom Landry, longtime coach of the Dallas Cowboys. It was a good book (even though it took me 3 years to read it during my vacation times. Since it's a book about the Cowboys, I had to hide in a closet and read it by the light of a flashlight!). In one section it talks about how Tom's wife Alicia dealt with his death – how much she loved him, her husband of 51 years, and what a big hole it left in her life. She said, at first you expect that one day he'll walk through the door, but then you realize that he'll never be there again, but you have to go on. Then Alicia said, "The awful pain subsides, ever so slowly, but *you have to live every second of it* until it does." Abundant living means being able to accept the defeats and losses and tragedies of life, and live through those times with courage, hope, faith, and humility.

One more brief, but important, aspect of the abundant living Jesus offers: ***It is eternal, everlasting life.*** What good would it be if this overflowing life that Jesus gives simply ended at the time of our death? What comfort, if all we could say is, "Well, it was nice while it lasted. It was a good run." But the New Testament is full of promises that claim this overflowing life found in Jesus lasts forever: it's called *eternal* life! In that same 10th chapter of John's gospel, where Jesus says He's come to bring *abundant life*, Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice: I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish" (John 10:27-28).

1 John 5:12 wraps it all together in a simple way: "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

